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# Relational Selves in Eighteenth-Century Literature

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RELATIONAL SELVES IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY LITERATURE

by

Kate Parker

A dissertation presented to the  
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences  
of Washington University in  
partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy

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2011

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November 2011  
Lewisburg, PA

**For Alena Kathleen Wilson and Benjamin Floyd-Clapman**

## **Table of Contents**

Acknowledgments

ii

Dedication

iv

Introduction

Relational Selves

1

Chapter One

*Spring*: Thomson's Anxious Affinities

16

Chapter Two

*Clarissa*: Collective Relations and the Evasion of Sexual Autonomy

66

Chapter Three

*The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*: Eliza Haywood's Promiscuous Machines

106

Chapter Four

*La Philosophie dans le boudoir*: Communal Sexuality and Mutual Pleasure in Sade

145

Conclusion

*The Relational Self and the 'Postmodern' Eighteenth Century*

181

Bibliography

188

Notes

201

## **Introduction**

### **Relational Selves**

The texts in this dissertation are all engaged in the project of articulating a particularized literary self. And yet, I argue, they are also deeply invested in dissolving the boundaries that would separate that particularized self from its various others: from the resplendent bodies of nature, from the frigid interests of the family, from the transitory affections of lovers, and from the fleeting pleasures of the orgy. The radically relational literary selves that I foreground here find definition and autonomy, paradoxically, through their widely dispersed investments of affect. Through the practice of sentimental mediation, they develop self-knowledge by seeking contingent but powerful connections to others. We imagine the eighteenth century to be a time when modern individuals constituted themselves against the forces of communal obligation, when marriage emerged as a union based on singular affection, and when sex became a definitive, if troubling, category of personal identity. But I claim that a libertine logic of communal attraction, spontaneous affiliation, and transitory affection remains central to the literary production of modern selfhood in the eighteenth century.

The term “libertine logic” emerges from my dissertation’s focus on sexual relationships as particularly formative for the literary self in the eighteenth century. The figure of the libertine, a character at once demonstrably anti-social and yet excessively available, fiercely independent and yet undeniably the product of his conquests, embodies the dialectic between feeling self and eroticized community that my dissertation asserts is vital to the eighteenth-century understanding of subjectivity.<sup>1</sup> Thus I argue that libertine



affections remain wildly indiscriminate in British literature beyond the Restoration, that they persist in the “Augustan” poetry of the early eighteenth century, and that they are central to the domestic sensibilities of mid-century fiction. I not only revise literary-historical lineages of the early English novel that see domestic writing as a departure from the more amatory sensibilities of the Restoration, but also reassess the tendency in sexuality studies to assume that libertine desire is truncated, made polite, and “reformulated” into “the privileged site of an emerging heterosexual hierarchy defining ‘male’ as that which corresponds to ‘female’ as a limit” by the middle of the eighteenth century, as Todd Parker suggests.<sup>2</sup> By understanding libertine sensibilities as more continuous throughout eighteenth-century literature, I also draw an important connection to the French *roman libertin*, which -- rising to prominence during the Enlightenment -- is usually demarcated from the eighteenth-century British novel.<sup>3</sup> Concluding my dissertation with a discussion of the influence of Richardson’s work on D.A.F. Sade, I emphasize the fertile influence of the British imagination on how French Enlightenment texts conceived of their own modern, fluid, literary selves.

In the past two decades, the question of whether or not the eighteenth-century self can in fact be called a *modern* self has ignited important philosophical debates about the nature of modernity and the limits of the human.<sup>4</sup> Eighteenth-century literary criticism has generally embraced the label of modernity, identifying the rise of the novel as evidence of literary innovation, the rise of the reading public as symptomatic of a nascent capitalism, and the rise of the autonomous individual as evidence of the declining influence of communal bodies -- historically, church, state, and family.<sup>5</sup> In taking issue with the last assertion, my project argues that eighteenth-century literature continued to

imagine an individual inextricably enmeshed in his or her communities. Selfhood was conceived in these texts as a highly particularized phenomenon at the intersection of complex social, political, aesthetic, and emotive networks. My approach thus takes impetus from the poststructuralist assumption that individuals are not separable from the ideological networks that produce and enfold them. I follow theorists like Michel Foucault and Bruno Latour in seeing the relationship between self and community as inherently complex and slippery, where social “assemblies” -- to borrow a term favored by Latour -- posit individuals as discrete beings only within deeply enmeshed social, political, and ecological contexts replete with other beings and things.<sup>6</sup>

Trying to make sense of how subjects come to internalize the expectations of broader political and social collectives, Foucault theorizes that power is a relational phenomenon, one both separate from and bound up in individual subjectivities. In an attempt to account for how power is “omnipresen[t]” in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, Foucault explains: “[it is] not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or *rather in every relation from one point to another*.”<sup>7</sup> This is an important distinction that Foucault makes and it necessitates some emphasis. The first formulation is quite clear: power is not visible, is not a discrete, material “unity” that can be identified or isolated, thus it must be fleeting, evasive, temporal, “produced from one moment to the next.” By describing power in temporal terms, as occurring in successive “moments,” “one...to the next,” Foucault summons the image of a localized network of individual nodes that invite and embody power consecutively and systematically, if still in fleeting, transient forms. Foucault is thus demonstrably tempted by the rules and mechanisms that

govern material bodies; he reiterates again that power is “produced...*at every point*,” suggesting that it is -- again, however fleetingly -- tangibly manifested and thus, at least in theory, identifiable in a microcosmic and highly particularized way in the individual body.

Then he corrects himself. “[O]r rather,” he surmises, power is *relational*. It exists not in “every point,” or even in *any* “point,” but “in every relation from one point to another.” There is, of course, a quite significant difference between the two claims. In one instance, power can be traced to the individual body that produces and replicates it, and in the other, power is, rather importantly, immaterial, located only in the nebulous, communal “relation” that joins “one point to another,” and ultimately, *all points together*. This is an ambiguity that recurs frequently in Foucault’s political thought. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, he describes the relations between bodies and political institutions as a “micro-physics of power,” “whose field of validity is situated *in a sense between* these great functionings and the bodies themselves with their materiality and their forces.”<sup>8</sup> Again, power emerges both “in...between,” and through “diffuse” technologies, the “bits and pieces” of discourse that flow through and around political subjects, but also, rather emphatically, in “the bodies themselves, with their materiality and their forces” -- in their individualized capacity for resistance and for regulation, in how they manifest discipline or docility.

At the heart of Foucault’s notion of power, then, is a relational model of subjectivity, one that recognizes the ways in which individuals can particularize themselves through local expressions of and resistance to power. Foucault is not alone in oscillating between the “micro-level of interactions” and the “macro-level” in his efforts

to define and give shape to social collectives; Latour, in *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*, calls the possibility of a defined “group” the “first source of uncertainty” in understanding and defining broader social and political collectives. In emphasizing instead “group formation” -- the *act* of assembling a group, the process of collecting and organizing human and nonhuman subjects rather than its product -- Latour thus describes social relations as associative and collective.<sup>9</sup> Latour’s formulation is important because, like Foucault’s characterization of power, it emphasizes the idea of both a subjectivity *in process* and the ways in which such subjective processes characterize collective or relational behavior as well as individual behavior. Latour calls for a sense of the overlaps between the individual and the communities of which she or he is part. Indeed, the processes by which both are formed, understood, and named are analogous. This is the understanding of selfhood that my dissertation identifies as integral to the portrayal of eighteenth-century literary selves. My project describes how, for example, characters as diverse as Eliza Haywood’s Betsy Thoughtless and D.A.F. Sade’s Dolmancé both strive to define themselves through the communities -- of would-be lovers and of the orgy, respectively -- in which they are inextricably enmeshed.

Feminist literary historians have turned to poststructuralist theory as a way of conceiving female subjectivity in a more resistant relationship to the dominant ideological discourses of the eighteenth century -- giving particular attention, as this dissertation does, to domestic fiction. Nancy Armstrong, in a compelling Foucauldian approach to the rise of the novel, has shown that the gendered discourse of domestic novels in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries necessitated “a whole new

vocabulary for social relations, terms that attached precise moral value to certain qualities of mind” rather than to specific gender roles or even to sex.<sup>10</sup> Novels written by and about women, Armstrong notes, dramatized the modern self as relational and as a product of complex emotional networks for the first time. This composite self defined a paradigm of feminine “qualities of mind” that came to determine the behavior of both female *and* male characters in the domestic fiction of the nineteenth century. As in my own project, Armstrong recognizes the importance of a relational model of subjectivity in defining female (and other marginalized) identity in the eighteenth century, and links this conditional and discursive identity to the capacity for desire and pleasure. But I diverge from Armstrong in her positing of this female subject as a corrective to the traditional notion of a political male subject, in her displacing of one abstract individual for another:

[t]his struggle to represent sexuality took the form of a struggle to individuate wherever there was a collective body, to attach psychological motives to what had been the openly political behavior of contending groups, and to evaluate these according to a set of moral norms that exalted the domestic woman over and above her aristocratic counterpart...*the female was the figure, above all else, on whom depended the outcome of the struggle among competing ideologies.*<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, it is Armstrong’s claim -- and not mine -- that “the modern individual was first and foremost a woman.”<sup>12</sup>

I instead aim to recover the very contingency of that, or any, “modern individual” self in the first instance, and to preserve the ambiguous relationship that the literature persists in maintaining between the individual and the political and social institutions of which she is part. While Armstrong is also somewhat attentive to the fluidity of literary selves, I question whether such a self could ever be called anything as determinate as an “outcome,” acknowledging the ways in which these selves are both subordinated to extensive networks of power and simultaneously striving to extricate themselves from such networks. By emphasizing collective relations as formative for subjects, I dismantle the strictly oppositional or hierarchical relationships that pit women against men, or humans against things. What my readings privilege instead is how individuals participate in broader and more dispersed affective relations in eighteenth-century literature. I find in such accounts a more positive and active kind of female subjectivity than has been hitherto recognized: one that abandons any fixed political position and becomes considerably more supple, more reactive, and more flexible as an element of the text. My project thus allows for the ways in which both female and male subjects understood themselves as mobile and polymorphous individuals within and through fictional networks of power and feeling. I thus share the concerns of critics like William Warner, who contend that Armstrong’s account is, in many ways, too oriented towards power and not enough towards play, pleasure, and movement.<sup>13</sup> My project asserts pleasure, mobility, and feeling as foundational to how eighteenth century texts rendered their subjects, and to how those subjects envisioned their relationship to broader social and political collectives within these texts.

My project thus revises a number of enduring assumptions in eighteenth-century studies. I question, for example, the critical commonplace that the British eighteenth-century novel defines the individual in opposition to his or her affective relations. This view has been promulgated, in particular, by Ian Watt's influential argument for the new prominence of individualism in *The Rise of the Novel*.<sup>14</sup> Watt claims that "the rise of individualism" in the eighteenth century "weaken[ed] communal and traditional relationships," placing new emphasis on "the kind of private and egocentric mental life" that characterize Defoe's early characters, but also, crucially, "the later stress on the importance of personal relationships which is so characteristic of modern society." For Watt, intriguingly, it is the burgeoning self-conscious interest in the individual that prompts the domestic novel's characteristically "modern" interest in "relationships," which "offer the individual a more conscious and selective pattern of social life to replace the more diffuse, and as it were involuntary, social cohesions which individualism had undermined."<sup>15</sup> While I actually agree with Watt that relationships are fundamental to the assertion of individuality in the literary texts of the eighteenth century, my project obviously privileges the second, more undefined, kind of "social cohesions" that Watt asserts lose value in the transition to modernity. I instead follow Latour in identifying the emergence of *publics*, interconnected social "assemblies" that are engaged in a kind of "constant commerce," "ceaseless swapping," and "endless crisscrossing of apparatuses, procedures, instruments, and customs." From such dynamic and teeming roots rise the sprawling, multiplicitous social and political identities that my dissertation describes in eighteenth century literature.<sup>16</sup> Latour goes further still; his articulation of the public sphere is so highly particularized as to include both its subjects *and* its objects in "endless

crisscrossing[s].” My own work seeks to live up to this inclusion. A chapter on the eroticized plenitude that shapes the poet-speaker in Thomson’s *Spring* anticipates the piecemeal subjectivity of Clarissa’s letters, with both confirming the relevance of things in the constitution of selfhood. How these collectives of persons and things motivate a specific individual to distinctive and exceptional action is thus a central concern of my project.

We also tend to assume that psychological interiority is cultivated in the absence of social interactions, and that the experience of feeling is thus deeply individualized. Yet recent scholarship has recognized the eighteenth century as a historical moment in which feelings are also experienced in an externalized and communal way. Adela Pinch argues that, in this period, feelings are actually represented as themselves autonomous, as derived -- but not inextricable -- from their human origins.<sup>17</sup> She cites as an example of this move David Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40), where the philosopher theorizes the possibility of a community of passions. The “social ‘force’” that Hume assigns feelings articulates the intersection between self and community at the profoundest levels of human experience. Indeed, Pinch sees that Hume tells two contradictory stories about feeling but that these stories are not mutually exclusive. Hume describes self-knowledge as arising from both the “individual authenticity of our emotional responsiveness” *and* the communicable and transsubjective nature of feelings within communities of other feeling beings. Hume thus supplies a powerful image of composite individualism, as the actual subjective experience of feeling occurs on a simultaneously individual and communal level, calling attention to the centrality of social interactions in the construction of selfhood. The emotion of pride, sketched by Hume,



nicely demonstrates this dialectic: it is a feeling brought on by our “sympathetic versions of other people’s feelings about us,” a clear “communication of sentiments,” neither wholly individual nor wholly communal.<sup>18</sup> It is precisely this kind of relational sense of self that I will emphasize in my own readings of eighteenth century literature.

So far, I have described how my dissertation recasts notions of interiority and subjectivity within communal contexts. Yet I also contend that social “forces,” to borrow Hume’s term, appear to serve localizing, particularizing, and individualizing functions in eighteenth-century literature. The interest in exteriority has recently preoccupied and galvanized the study of subjectivity in our field. Insightful works published in 2010 by Jonathan Kramnick and Julie Park strive to connect phenomenological concerns in the period with the agency of the mind and the construction of identity, respectively.<sup>19</sup> Both Kramnick and Park assert a real lack of distinction between the self and its objects or things, claims that I find compelling in my own work.<sup>20</sup> Yet, these narratives tend to replace the historical understanding of selfhood as fully intimate or private with equally comprehensive claims for its externality -- as Kramnick puts it, for the ways in which a subject’s “[a]ctions extend mind into the world.”<sup>21</sup> My dissertation approaches this issue rather differently, in that I purposefully resist the substitution of one kind of subjectivity for another. Instead, I claim that representations of selfhood in the works I study are firmly ambiguous on this point: selfhood is a highly private state of being paradoxically *because* of one’s immersion in exterior relations of all kinds, hence the term “relational self,” which seeks to preserve and embody this dialectic.<sup>22</sup> Many of the works I study grapple precisely with the question of how one can become autonomous or exceptional if so much of who one is is determined by our relationship with others. Tensions,

problems, and contradictions tumble from these works as they try to preserve their in-between-ness, their image of a self hovering on the borders of autonomy and community but never finding rest in the possibilities and limitations of either. Thus, in both its terminology and its methodology, my project has tried to preserve these contradictions *as contradictions*, and to allow for the same deep sense of ambiguity that the literature itself exhibits.

My dissertation studies four individuals -- the proto-Romantic poet of *The Seasons*, Richardson's Clarissa, Haywood's Betsy Thoughtless, and Sade's Dolmancé -- within the networks that enfold and produce them. These characters, I claim, can only become exceptional by immersing themselves in the diverse communities that surround them. My first chapter, "*Spring*: James Thomson's Anxious Affinities," argues that Thomson's poem infuses its culminating vision of companionate love with the dynamic, collective eroticism of nature. The poem compulsively traces its own circular narrative, in which the poet-speaker evinces a sense of anxiety about the possibilities of representing and "courting" a nominally feminine profusion of nature. Thomson aims to reconcile his displacement by imagining poetry as a productive form of creative confluence, the poet working *with* the natural world. I relate this to Thomson's own sexual experience, aligning the uncontrolled and powerful elements of spring with his self-professed "Muse" and financial patron, the Countess of Hertford, and the more defined and polite impulses with his "happy vision" of a marriage to Elizabeth Young. I thus contend that *Spring* is a work of erotic literature because it so energetically renders the tensions between companionate and polymorphous desire, and further, frames this

tension as a question of cultural and social progress -- a “modernizing” move not typically associated with georgic poetry.

In my second chapter, I bring the study of affective dispersal to one of the key documents for the “rise” of a new liberal individualism. In “*Clarissa: Collective Relations and the Problem of Sexual Autonomy*,” I argue that the era’s quintessential individual -- Clarissa Harlowe -- becomes exceptional only through her reliance upon transitory sentimental affinities. Even more self-consciously than Thomson, Richardson plays out the clash of Restoration erotic sensibilities and companionate courtship. I recover typically overlooked energies in the novel: Lovelace is a polyamorous rake who finds himself defined by one monogamous intrigue, and Clarissa is a sexually virtuous woman who engages in a steady stream of erotic intimacies with her friends, family, and even foes. I contend that Clarissa’s fleeting affinities actually align her more with amatory heroines and other libertine tropes of intrigue and seduction, a conclusion that allows me to reassess the literary-historical lineage that separates authors like Eliza Haywood from moralizing domestic writers like Richardson.

My third chapter continues this line of thought, opening with a comparison of Haywood’s *Fantomina* and Richardson’s *Clarissa* to highlight the shared liberties and the limits of erotic affiliation on women’s desire. “*The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless: Eliza Haywood’s Promiscuous Machines*” then stages a related argument about the unnaturalness of companionate marriage, given the power and pleasure inherent in polyamorous affections. Even as she is writing what many scholars see as her most didactic novel, Haywood subverts the expectations of this genre by privileging promiscuous affections in a world plagued by incompatibility: suitors and lovers are

mismatched and manipulative, narrators and friends are deceptive and unreliable, men and women share indistinguishable physical and emotional qualities, and sexual double-standards arise at every turn. Companionship becomes wholly impossible in such a world, as does true self-knowledge. The alternative -- a “hurry of promiscuous diversions” -- promises pleasure and, at least, the possibility for genuine, spontaneous feeling. Betsy’s “thoughtlessness” prevents her attachment to any one companion for the majority of the novel, and -- like Clarissa’s “powers of moving,” her sentimental affinities -- offers an alternative to the dangers of being defined solely by a companionate marriage.

My fourth and final chapter, “*La Philosophie dans le Boudoir: Communal Sexuality and Mutual Pleasure*,” takes seriously the fact that Sade admired Richardson’s fictions, and asserts that orgiastic desire is simultaneously limiting and enabling for male libertines, who must abandon apathy and critical distance for mutually-reinforcing pleasure in order to achieve communal orgasm. In this text, real pleasure can only be achieved through collective desire. Sade thus enacts the professed goal of sexual complementarity -- mutual and perfect physical unity between wholly disparate beings -- and expands it, dismantling its couplings and spectacularly dissolving its bonds. *La Philosophie* persuasively demonstrates a crucial aspect of my larger argument: that libertine desire is not synonymous with phallic desire -- as is usually presumed -- but, in fact, often organizes itself around the collective and mutual desires of others. Building from my discussion of the sensibilities of orgy, a conclusion considers the implications of a radically relational subjectivity for reassessing the critical emphasis on historical and literary individualism as one of the eighteenth century’s defining outcomes.

My dissertation invites poetry and prose, English and French authors, polite and pornographic texts into a lively discussion of the persistent crossings of self and community in eighteenth-century literature. Because the relational self inhabits forms as critically divergent as georgic poetry, the domestic novel, and the *roman libertin*, my project charts thematic resonances across generically and formally diverse texts, sanctioned by comparative approaches that encourage such inclusivity while still demanding close attention to historical and cultural context.<sup>23</sup> The spontaneous affinities of Thomson's *Spring*, the dissembling media of Richardson's *Clarissa*, the overlapping social strata of Haywood's *Betsy Thoughtless*, and the contingent vulnerabilities of the Sadeian libertine each present versions of an exceptional self subordinated to collectives, with each text formalizing these relationships in different, yet profoundly resonant ways. Accordingly, my methodology strives to remain equally flexible: Chapter One combines Jean-Joseph Goux's materialist retelling of sexual history with feminist critiques of the gaze, both of which offer suggestive considerations for reassessing Ralph Cohen's formalist, "process-based" analysis of Thomson. The second and third chapters collaborate in reconsidering the established story of the early British novel, particularly its tendency to separate domestic from amatory fiction. I see Richardson's *Clarissa* and Haywood's *Betsy Thoughtless* as participating in a shared project of representing an exemplary feminine self as the product of her familial, social, and sexual relations. Finally, in its analysis of the textual and spectatorial mechanics of the orgy, Chapter Four aims to situate Sade within the tradition of British sensibility -- an overlooked influence in most readings of the Marquis, which tend toward the theoretical, often at the expense

of the textual. Each chapter remains attentive to the text, while still aiming to situate the relational self within the broader theoretical and critical context of the dissertation.

## Chapter One

### *Spring*: James Thomson's Anxious Affinities

Augustan poetry is not usually assumed to engage with questions of modernity, and particularly not with the emerging technologies for representing subjectivity in the early eighteenth century. Such literary innovation and progressive work has been historically reserved for the novel.<sup>1</sup> But in this chapter I argue that the poet James Thomson draws upon the affective networks of a sentimentalized Nature to carve out a particularized, eroticized identity in *Spring* (1728), a project that has important resonances for the radically relational and eroticized selves of sentimental novels like Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748-9) and libertine fiction like Sade's *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795). In this poem, one of the four *Seasons* (1730), Thomson self-consciously portrays the tenuousness of human identity, particularly when the self is placed dynamically in contact with sentimentalized objects that elicit its wildest passions and its most fervent enthusiasm. However, I contend, these frenzied passions often bring into greater relief the particularized, feeling perspective of the poet-speaker. By bringing the insights of recent posthumanist work on natural collectives to bear on early formalist approaches to Thomson, this chapter begins to develop this dissertation's understanding of how desire acts as a simultaneously individual and collective mechanism in forming and shaping the modern literary self.

It is surprising that a work unabashedly dedicated to the celebration of "NATURE'S *great Command*" is rarely read as an erotic poem, but this paradox speaks

rather precisely to the unusual representation Thomson offers us of sex and sexuality in his poem *Spring*. While few would argue that this poem is explicitly about sex, the kind of sex it depicts and, more importantly, the way in which sex is represented -- in sweeping, populous vernal landscapes -- must register as foreign, and maybe even somewhat chaste, to contemporary readers accustomed to understanding sex in more graphic, intimate, and non-collective terms.<sup>2</sup> That Thomson's work did excite its readers, however, is well-documented.<sup>3</sup> John Aikin, a prominent physician and literary critic reflected in 1781 that "no poem was ever composed which addressed itself to the feelings of a greater number of readers," and Sir Harris Nicolas, editor of the 1830 edition of *The Poetical Works of James Thomson*, writes that "when he breaks upon us in some spontaneous burst of passion...we sympathise with the man, and are excited to kindred enthusiasm."<sup>4</sup> And Thomson himself thought *Spring* compelling enough to woo a lover; he sent drafts of later versions to the reluctant Elizabeth Young, as a means of convincing her to one day share this "happy picture" with him.<sup>5</sup> But late twentieth-century critics of *The Seasons* -- while sifting through the complexities of its portrayal of human subjectivity, the nuances of its form, and even its physiological and emotional enthusiasm -- have all failed to register the significance of *Spring*'s erotic content.<sup>6</sup> Part of the project of this chapter is to attend purposefully and seriously to the erotic content of Thomson's poem. My chapter contends that Thomson's *Spring* understands sexual relations as a powerful form of creative confluence, joining subject with object in the project of poetry, but also evinces deep anxieties about how this process destabilizes the role of poet-speaker, both as imagined suitor and as "creator."



What Thomson paints in *Spring*, I argue, is a world in which one cannot visually or emotionally distinguish between self and other, and further, where aesthetic and erotic pleasure results from precisely such a confluence. In this cooperative envisioning of the natural world, Thomson's poetry anticipates many of the important insights of Enlightenment vitalism, though of a historical moment immediately prior to its efflorescence. As Peter Reill has observed, the vitalist movement in the eighteenth century was particularly invested in restructuring how the natural world *looks* to its observers, and in collapsing the relationship between viewing subject and natural object. Vitalistic epistemology actively sought to "dissolve the strict distinction between observer and observed," effectively contracting the ontological gap between subject and object, as "both were related within a much larger conjunction of living matter."<sup>7</sup> In Thomson, the collapse between subject and object occurs even on the level of form: Heather Keenleyside has read personification and periphrasis as tropological signals of instability in Thomson's poetry, signs of a profound uncertainty in the relationship between persons and nature in *The Seasons*. Thomson blurs precisely those categories -- person/thing, whole/part, human/animal -- that earlier critics believed fundamentally separate in the "Augustan" world-view.<sup>8</sup> For Keenleyside, then, a perceived "unity" between the human and natural world actually masks a deeply troubling ontological confusion, where "the basic unit of Thomson's ontology" is no longer the "unique individual."<sup>9</sup> Thomson's poetry thus narrates selfhood from the intersections of the local and the global, the miniscule and the macrocosmic, and interprets the subject's relationship to nature within a proto-vitalistic lens, as "a teeming interaction of active forces vitalizing matter, revolving around each other in a developmental dance," much

like the Latourian “assemblies” that emphasize “group formation” instead of fully-formed groups.<sup>10</sup>

Thomson’s ability to capture these “teeming...active forces” through figurative language delighted but also challenged his contemporaries’ understanding of what constituted good descriptive poetry. In a formal study of Thomson, *The Unfolding of the Seasons*, Ralph Cohen responds to the commonplace charge by eighteenth-century readers that Thomson’s poetry is “too loose” by arguing the opposite: that the *Seasons* are aesthetically and epistemologically unified. In *Spring*, according to Cohen, erotic love is the mechanism that aligns (hu)man with nature, and, by extension, situates and positions the particular image within Thomson’s broader poetic vision. For Cohen, then, a high value is placed on synthesis and on unity of design as characteristic Augustan virtues.<sup>11</sup> More recent studies -- in particular, Kevis Goodman’s excellent work on the georgics -- have considered dissonance, not unity, as a defining feature of early eighteenth-century poetry, with Thomson a key figure in her study.<sup>12</sup> The present chapter combines both insights in arguing that Thomson’s *Spring* hovers between the equally-restrictive categories of unity and dissonance; the poet-speaker oscillates between the focused and local perspective of attentive observer and the swarming global perspective of a subject subsumed by generative Nature. The poet-speaker’s ambiguous relationship to the natural world thus betrays Thomson’s rather profound ambivalence about sex: it is both a natural and meaningful mechanism of joyful connection and of reproduction, but one that carries unpredictable risks and rejections. While the rituals and imagery of sex certainly offer Thomson an attractive analogy to describe the complexities of the natural world, the poem’s erotic landscapes also betray Thomson’s own anxieties about the social and

political implications of a world in which categories of maleness, of the individual, and indeed, of humanity more broadly, are by necessity *not* dominant. Thomson is, then, both enthralled by the capacity of Nature to seduce and consume him, but also instinctively seeks to preserve his own autonomy as poet-creator, his sense of self that threatens to collapse at every turn. In *Spring*, this tension is embodied, most palpably, in Thomson's representations of his real-life lovers: his patron and "Muse," the Countess of Hertford, and *Spring's* Amanda, Elizabeth Young, whose financial, social, and sexual powers over the poet repeatedly surface, almost obsessively, in his work.

In short, Thomson negotiates the unpredictable and enigmatic behavior of his lovers by analogizing his own pursuit of love to the way a poet might successfully capture the wilds of Nature: through spontaneous affinities, through careful negotiations, and through transient -- yet meaningful -- contact. But these are often demonstrably unsatisfying compromises for an ardent lover who wants to possess his mistress fully -- or for a poet who wants to capture his subject perfectly -- and so, in some moments, an increasingly anxious Thomson emerges, a Thomson who is eager to establish humanity's authoritative hold over an ordered and controllable Nature, as Marjorie Hope Nicolson, Patricia Meyer Spacks and others have recognized.<sup>13</sup> But while critics have tended to focus on how such alternating currents of diffusion and contraction have signified politically or aesthetically in the period, I consider how this dialectic complicates our assumption that sexual subjectivity, in particular, is a deeply intimate and thus highly particularized state of being. In this chapter, I argue that Thomson's portrayal of the sexed body as a landscape -- and, of the aroused observer as part of that landscape, rather than as separate from it -- necessitates a more nuanced conception of sexuality and its

ontological categories, one that can account for the teeming multiplicity inherent in both Thomson's "lover," and his characterization of the poet-speaker as both the source and the subject of its powerful representations.

Though it was widely read and celebrated, *Spring*'s erotic landscape is strange and even perverse enough to continue to raise questions about the sexual proclivities of its author.<sup>14</sup> While I am not the first critic to express some interest in Thomson's sexuality, most are brief, at best, on the subject. In a cursory biographical note in their acclaimed anthology of eighteenth-century poetry, David Fairer and Christine Gerrard speculate that Thomson might have been gay, as he never married and spent most of his time drinking and cavorting with groups of male friends.<sup>15</sup> In another instance, James Sambrook, Thomson's conscientious biographer, reports a number of bizarre stories circulated by Thomson's friends and associates about his strange sexual behaviors, each seeming more preposterous than the last: the notoriously shy and gentle Thomson lewdly groping and cursing female companions on a alcohol-fueled bender; Thomson spying on his female neighbors undressing through a peep-hole in his floor (and having his nose burned by their candle when he fell asleep "on the watch"); Thomson loitering on street corners in Edinburgh hoping to catch a glimpse of women lifting their hoop skirts as they crossed the street. (He did actually write some poetry about this, of course -- an adolescent and rather titillated poem called "On the Hoop," where the "hoop and tartan both combine / To make a virgin like a goddess shine.")<sup>16</sup> Still, Thomson was demonstrably *unsuccessful* in love: the two most influential women in his life were Hertford and Young, and neither openly returned his affections. Yet both women figure rather prominently in this particular *Season*, with Hertford its "Muse" and Young the

purported impetus for extensive revisions to the 1744 version of *The Seasons*, particularly the introduction of the lover “Amanda” into the poem.

There are, then, two stories that I want to tell about James Thomson, and they are related. One is of a writer who tried to find emotional solace and poetic purpose by losing himself in the mysterious flux of a divinely-ordered natural world. The other is of a man who wanted to believe himself truly exceptional: as a poet, as a lover, and as a human being made “LORD,” “but not...Tyrant” of God’s creation. I will argue in this chapter that Thomson achieved neither to his satisfaction, but that *Spring* can instead be read as a testament to what I’ll later describe as the “Toil”: Thomson’s articulation of creation and seduction as *process* in which consummation is never complete or fully achieved, but in which the pursuit is, indeed, often all there is. In what follows, I will begin by examining *Spring*’s vexed portrayal of female sexuality through the lens of Thomson’s influential relationship with Hertford. I argue that Hertford -- or, more particularly, the landscape that Thomson paints to embody her -- becomes the locus for a sexualized struggle between author and patron for figurative and poetic control, the control of the “I”/eye that serves as the aesthetic and ontological center of the poem. Hertford’s doubly-influential status -- as both Thomson’s patron and object of affection -- makes her a formidable and often impenetrable presence in *Spring* even as she is depicted as its benevolent Muse. Thus, while the natural world in *Spring* attracts the poet-speaker, it also challenges his phallocentric sense of unity and meaning, and threatens to subsume the “I”/eye into its indeterminate collective. In a struggle to maintain his creation as independent from the prolific and abundant gifts of his Muse, Thomson rather uncharacteristically persists in strict oppositions between poet and Creation, between

lover and landscape. These oppositions, however, frequently leave him in despair, signaling his isolation from the feminized landscape he desperately wants to possess.

### **The Countess of Hertford and the Matter of (m)Othering**

Written sometime in Thomson's early career, an ode to an unresponsive lover -- called, simply, "Song" -- rather compactly prefigures tendencies that dominate the landscape of *Spring*, and does so in compelling ways. The two poems are formally quite contrastive: while *Spring* is an expansive explosion of love, the verses of this "Song" are comparatively stifled, cramped, claustrophobic, and uninspired. I reproduce it in its entirety here:

Unless with my *Amanda* blest  
In vain I twine the woodbine bower;  
Unless to deck her sweeter breast,  
In vain I rear the breathing flower:  
  
Awaken'd by the genial year,  
In vain the birds around me sing;  
In vain the fresh'ning fields appear:  
Without my love there is no spring.<sup>17</sup>

The poet's emotional shackles are echoed in the unimaginative and unyielding adherence to iambic tetrameter, and again in the anaphoric openings that pronounce the

heartbreaking refrains “unless” and “in vain.” Further, and perhaps most noticeable to a reader comparing this poem to *Spring*, there is a pronounced lack of enjambment. By contrast, the lines of *Spring* -- indeed, of all of the *Seasons* -- are extremely flexible, heavily-enjambed blank verse. They house innovative, imagistic, periphrastic diction: no line resembles its neighbor. In comparison, the “Song” is obvious, awkward, clumsy. And yet, despite the deflating subject, despite the uninspired language, despite the constricting form, this poem, like *Spring*, is erotically charged. Why?

The poem eroticizes a struggle for control: Thomson’s wavering faith in his poetic productions is intensified by his sexual defeat. The imagery here is surprisingly rich, juxtaposing two complementary registers of production: the poet, who insistently creates despite the futility of doing so, and the lover, who, through a refusal to “bles[s]” the poet, negates but cannot fully diffuse his desire. Even as the poet is in the process of creating -- noting the present tense, “I twine,” “I deck,” “I rear” -- such powerful acts of generation are always “in vain.” Thus, despite the poet’s urgent exertions, the theme is impotence, underscored by Amanda’s refusal to supply her body and her “sweeter breast” as a landscape for him to adorn and preen. Without the context of this amorous and receptive landscape, his poetic flourishes have no real significance, and though the poet is ultimately still aroused (“awaken’d by the genial year”), he cannot consummate his love. The second verse confirms his loss of control. The season rushes in upon him: “fresh’ning fields appear” and “birds...sing,” seemingly independent of and external to the poet, who no longer “rears” the imagery. In fact, the “I” of the poem finds himself wholly excised from his own poetic creations, the “woodbine bower” and “breathing flower” fruitlessly generated in the opening stanza. The final line proves his defeat: there

is no spring if there will be no Amanda. And yet, despite this seeming finality, the poem resonates with traces of the poet's desire, prevailing despite the certainty of his lover's perpetual refusals.

In its dense depiction of poetic creation as a form of failed sexual courtship, the "Song" anticipates some of *Spring*'s dominant erotic motifs. Particularly, it introduces the female-body-as-landscape, and, further, the characteristics of this landscape -- its "Negligence...wide, and wild"-- that allow it simultaneously to register and resist the philosophical, aesthetic, and emotional gaze of the poet-speaker.<sup>18</sup> Further, the "Song" also testifies to Thomson's ambivalence when his own powerfully mutable depictions of female fertility and sexuality press upon -- indeed, even threaten to supplant -- the unifying, governing image of the *Seasons*' poet-as-creator. So, as Spring unfolds in a blooming garden, for example, the "I"/eye is passively "Snatch'd thro' the verdant Maze," "hurried" and "Distracted" by a "mingled Wilderness of Flowers" that overwhelms the spectator visually and defuses his gaze.<sup>19</sup> And, shortly after, his visual displacement spirals into a loss of poetic control: the poet's "varied Verse" is no longer his own, but the result of a "Theme rising" independently from the "vegetable World" and also "len[t]" by the "Nightingales," who "pour / The mazy-running Soul of Melody" -- the vital energy -- into his poetry.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, throughout *Spring*, the sensual intensity of Nature infuses -- rather, inundates -- Thomson's descriptions. In particular, this displacement serves to challenge the notion of the poet both as a solitary, omnipotent spectator (whose eye can be violently "snatch'd" into Nature's serpentine "Maze") and, by extension, as the solitary, omnipotent author (whose verse ultimately only siphons the



dynamic tide of avifaunal “Melody”). As the poetry dissolves into the landscape, then, curiously, so does the poet.

Thomson uses another suggestive metaphor for this dissolution and diffusion: the female breast, which often characterizes the landscape of *Spring*. However -- unlike the “Song” of the nightingales and the “Theme” of the vegetables, both moments in which the poet *shares* his vision with Nature -- the breast registers both the poet’s resistance to the landscape as well as his attraction, and thus signals Thomson’s growing ambivalence about being seduced by a specifically *feminized* Nature. While the breast is sentimental and eroticized under the penetrating eye of a lover, it is also independently, and rather formidably, prolific and effusive.<sup>21</sup> It threatens to obscure, rather than to sharpen, what Thomson posits as otherwise productive, and seemingly self-contained, oppositions: the distinction between male and female physiology, or between the expectations of a nominally feminine Nature as maternal or as sexual. Thus the landscape, and particularly, the landscape-figured-as-breast, is at once sexually ambiguous, powerfully seductive, and comfortingly maternal.

At least some of this paradox has been argued to characterize the early modern imagination of the natural world more generally, although research has tended to focus more on the early American landscape and its response to colonial invasion than on the British countryside.<sup>22</sup> Annette Kolodny, in her pioneering work of feminist eco-criticism *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor As Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (1984), uncovers a troubling problematic when she writes that “[i]mplicit in the metaphor of land-as-woman was both the regressive pull of maternal containment *and* the seductive invitation to sexual assertion.”<sup>23</sup> Tracing the “threatening, alien, and potentially

emasculating terror of the unknown” expressed by the white European colonizers of the Americas, Kolodny helpfully recognizes a primal “need to experience the land as a nurturing, giving maternal breast,” a means of neutralizing and diffusing its inherent and invisible threats.<sup>24</sup> For Kolodny, the feminization of the landscape allows the male colonizer to repress his fear through a powerful and comforting fiction: the landscape becomes familiar as the ultimate expression of nourishment, inviting his occupation and succumbing to his needs in the same way a mother brings her child to breast. But for Thomson, intriguingly, the feminization of the landscape does not always signal comfort and provision. Indeed, the act of feminizing can be precisely what makes the landscape seem strange, foreign, and Other to the poet-speaker. The breast -- and, indeed, Thomson’s representations of female sexuality more generally -- is not transparently or straightforwardly receptive. The female-body-as-landscape is instead a site where the typical expectations for sexed bodies and beings are confused, where the female body is not familiar or inviting territory, but a lush, dangerous, overpowering, and threatening landscape.

Returning to the “Song,” we can see that the breast initially appears as a rather straightforward metaphor for what the poet cannot have: Amanda’s love. And yet, the couplet in which the breast appears is anything but straightforward: Thomson writes, “Unless to deck her sweeter breast / In vain I rear the breathing flower.” The common association between the breast and “rear[ing]” (as the expected occupation of a breast) gives the couplet a strong feminine subject, and yet it is the male poet -- not the female lover -- who must “rear” in this case. Thomson creates a double significance for the act of “rearing” as one of nurturing but also of generation: the poet brings the flower into

existence, and then must also sustain it because the “sweeter breast” has rejected it. The breast refuses to become a backdrop, a landscape that the flower might only “deck” or “adorn.” Thus despite the poet’s best efforts to sentimentalize the “sweeter” breast, and thereby, to incorporate it into his romantic vision of spring as a potent expression of complementary coupling, the breast -- cold, evasive -- remains problematically external to the unfolding *tableau*. The poet, then, occupies a sexually ambiguous position in the poem: his lover’s perpetual refusal means that he must generate and nourish the flower alone, without her “bles[sing.]”

This is not, then, a breast that nurtures the poet-speaker, as in Kolodny’s formulation, but one that rejects and further alienates the poet (and, importantly, his creative offspring). It remains persistently foreign and impenetrable, refusing to yield even to the poet’s pleading supplications. And yet, this resisting and unyielding body is still a source of pleasure for the poet, perhaps made even more so by the ways in which the poet must compensate with his own desires for Amanda’s continuous refusal. Gillian Rose, in her compelling discussion of the visual/sexual politics of “looking at landscape,” registers this kind of sexual ambivalence in the complex “pleasures that geographers feel,” pleasures that are “not innocent...nor...simple.”<sup>25</sup> Rose’s book -- a thoughtful response to the masculinist orientation of the discipline of geography in the 1990s -- explores the problematically empirical, knowing gaze that always installs itself as a “master subject” over the landscape it seeks to know and to probe. To characterize this complex visual relationship, Rose combines the approaches of psychoanalysis and feminist aesthetics to conclude that the male gaze is not infallibly dominant, but in fact “inherently unstable, subverted by its own desire for the pleasure that it fears.”<sup>26</sup> The

landscape, then, is perceived as simultaneously alluring and terrifying, and it is precisely this dialectical, “unstable” component of the male gaze that Thomson explodes in “Song” when he promiscuously mixes the imagery of active generation with the language of impotent passivity. Unable to fully resist or to consummate his desire, the poet is left suspended between the role of the passive, feminized lover and the virile, masculinized creator. Borrowing from Rose’s paraphrasing of Laura Mulvey’s dialectic of the gaze, here, the poet can be understood as “always torn between two conflicting impulses: on one hand, a narcissistic identification with what [he] sees and through which [he] constitutes [his] identity; and on the other, a voyeuristic distance from what is seen as Other to [him].”<sup>27</sup>

This dialectic offers one rich way of conceiving Thomson’s relationship to a resisting nature/lover in both “Song” and, I will show, in *Spring*: by installing himself in the landscape, he turns unrequited love into a productive, prolific and powerful source of sexual fantasy. In his poetry, Thomson meditates anxiously on the pervasive influence exerted by a lover who alone can “bles[s]” the poet and his creation, and without whom “there is no” text at all. Such an aesthetic model, I argue, springs from the close, and yet demonstrably unsatisfying, relationship that Thomson enjoyed with the Countess of Hertford.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, because Hertford is both Thomson’s patron and the indifferent object of his affections, she is doubly constitutive of the erotic dynamic I have been sketching: she is both powerful and passive, both alluring and distant. As Hertford is Thomson’s patron and he her beneficiary, their relationship is structured by a strict power dynamic and a very specific, established set of expectations, and yet she is also the fantasized

lover embedded into the “blooming and benevolent” landscape of Spring, a lover Thomson desperately wants to conquer and adore.

Indeed, the relationship between Thomson and Hertford is one of the most extensively glossed aspects of *Spring*, and -- at one time -- sparked quite a bit of curiosity from Thomson’s critics, though it seems to attract significantly less attention now.<sup>29</sup> Beginning with Helen Sard Hughes’ essay “Thomson and the Countess of Hertford,” published in *Modern Philology* in May 1928, and ending with a series of responses in the 1970s and 1990s, there are a number of critical works that investigate Hertford’s formidable influence as Thomson was composing *Spring* at her estate in Marlborough. Hughes cites Thomson’s affection in his dedication to the first edition of *Spring* in 1728, and I will gloss this more extensively below:

Happy! if I have hit any of those Images, and corresponding Sentiments,  
your calm Evening Walks, in the most delightful retirement, have oft  
inspired. I could add, too, that as this Poem grew up under your  
Encouragement, it has therefore a natural Claim to your Patronage.<sup>30</sup>

Thomson’s poised but intimate praise, here, imagines his “Poem” as a child “gr[o]w[ing] up under” Hertford’s nurturing “Encouragement,” able to lay a “natural Claim” to her as its mother/patron. Indeed, while Thomson conventionally adopts the supplicating pose of the poet channeling his muse, he -- perhaps less conventionally -- casts the material product within a familial and complementary fantasy, where the poem becomes the

offspring of two lovers, a child that he and Hertford have, presumably, raised and “Encourage[d]” -- indeed, *reared* -- together.

Hughes also exhaustively traces Thomson’s intimate references to Hertford -- and, even, Hertford’s blushing, if polite, marginal responses, in her hand-copied versions surviving at Alnwick Castle -- in Thomson’s early poetry: particularly, in the initial, unpublished drafts of “A Hymn on Solitude.”<sup>31</sup> For example, Hughes identifies the appearance of “gentle-looking Hertford’s Bloom” in a draft of the “Hymn” that she dates to 1727 or 1728: a version that likely would have been composed and reworked alongside *Spring*.<sup>32</sup> She also notes an important edit to the final lines, but does not really speculate as to its meaning:

Oh let me peirce [*sic*] thy Secret hill  
And in Thy deep Recesses dwell  
Forever from the World retir’d  
Forever with thy Raptures fir’d  
Nor by a mortal seen save He  
A Lycidas, or Lycon be.<sup>33</sup>

Hughes underscores the significance of the phrase “Secret hill” in this particular version, which replaces the “Secret cell” of the first published version in 1729. It is probably, Hughes intimates, a reference to Marlborough Mount, and thus to Hertford’s own cherished haunts and landscapes, where Thomson himself wandered and meditated as he composed his poetry. The association, then, of the “Secret hill” with Hertford makes the

poem's final lines highly suggestive: Thomson imagines himself phallically "peirc[ing]" the "Secret" mount, "dwell[ing]" in its "deep Recesses," "Forever" fired with her "Raptures." In this very particular and deeply personal draft -- which is not the version Thomson eventually made public -- he explicitly imagines Hertford as an erotic, feminized landscape that can be penetrated and occupied.<sup>34</sup> Her "Secret hill" is simultaneously also a space of blissful solitude, of what Kolodny calls "maternal containment": a hermitage where the poet is protected, nurtured, and sustained, "Forever from the World retir'd."

I cite this evidence to show that Thomson was, quite clearly, in the habit of fantasizing about his "most valuable woman patron" as a sexualized landscape that he, as beneficiary, was uniquely permitted to explore, probe, and penetrate.<sup>35</sup> But he is not always so bold, and, indeed, Hertford's body-as-landscape is not always so receptive. In another of his "Songs," Thomson imagines "sympathetic groves" and "dying lilies" communicating the love he dare not express:

Oh! tell her what she cannot blame,  
Tho' fear my tongue must ever bind;  
Oh tell her that my virtuous flame  
Is as her spotless soul refin'd...<sup>36</sup>

Though "sympathetic," the wasting Nature surrounding the poet becomes his mouthpiece, wooing Hertford for him by "tell[ing] her" what he cannot: that he loves her, supposedly "virtuous[ly]." In lamenting the futility of his affection for the Countess, Thomson tries

to console himself with a solitary hope: his conclusion that “[t]rue love and friendship are the same.”<sup>37</sup> Thomson thus optimistically conflates the acceptable, polite relationship he currently enjoys with Hertford with the sexual relationship he ultimately desires, for what the poem’s final stanza reveals, in fact, is that his intentions are anything but “spotless”:

But if at first her virgin fear  
Should start at love’s suspected flame  
With that of friendship soothe her ear—  
True love and friendship are the same.<sup>38</sup>

Thomson is quite obviously aware that true love and friendship are *not* the same to Hertford, because a (motivated) promise of friendship will “soothe her ear” while a confession of love will make “her virgin fear / ...start.” A tongue-tied, and yet also quite artful Thomson appears sympathetic and innocuous while plotting to seduce his patron. These “Songs” both depict Thomson as divorced from Hertford and yet despairingly trying to connect with her by invoking social mechanisms: through moral cultivation and friendship, respectively. The same kind of distance characterizes Hertford as *Spring*’s Muse, even as she becomes associated with more expansive vernal qualities. Indeed, Hertford remains enigmatic and elusive even as she embodies the blushing and blossoming erotic qualities of spring.

Hertford emerges into the *Season* immediately after its opening invocation. I will examine these initial lines with some attention, as they reveal a subtly estranged Hertford couched within Thomson’s seemingly conventional praise:



COME, gentle Spring, ethereal Mildness, come.  
And from the bosom of yon dropping cloud,  
While music wakes around, veil'd in a shower  
Of shadowing roses, on our plains descend.<sup>39</sup>

The invocation prepares the reader for the vitalistic universe of *Spring*, where nature is not only “complex” but in “continuous movement.”<sup>40</sup> The imagistic opening lines move “From the bosom of yon dropping cloud” to spring “wak[ing]” as music and simultaneously “shower[ing]” the “plains” with “shadowing roses.” This complex image depends on the seemingly endless versatility of moisture as a metaphor for the coming of Spring: the music, perhaps, a soft rain, a multitude of droplets like rose petals pelting the ground. The “dropping cloud” is figured as a maternal “Bosom” that generates this synesthetic “music”: if literally, transforming airy gas into material, into liquid rain, and if figuratively, composing the vernal song completely independently of the poet. Indeed, the poet, despite his booming invocation “COME,” is rather irrelevant; Spring “descends,” suggestively from a curvy bosom, a scantily-clad lover “veil’d” in her “shower / Of shadowing roses.”

As Cohen has also observed, Thomson uses the metaphor of the “Bosom” rather awkwardly, or at least inconsistently, here.<sup>41</sup> The fertilizing rain, dropping onto “our plains” from the “Bosom” cloud, seems almost seminal (particularly so when read in the context of the “penetrating” sunbeams, also descending from the sky, only a few lines ahead). Further, the scene that follows immediately also features a “Bosom,” this time a

more conventional maternal Earth, which passively receives the seed from the husbandman and encloses it in its womb. But even this “bosom” is characterized by its processes of generation. In a typically didactic georgic scene, Thomson describes the introduction of seed into a “nursing Mold,” the matrix of the earth, “mixing” this fertile soil with the nourishing “Current[s]” and “Rain” that have been rather sumptuously “flung” about by Nature’s “liberal hand.”<sup>42</sup> Here the mixing of seed with land is both generative and ubiquitous, both the origin and the product of the extensive variety present in the natural world. Mixture, then, is the cooperative mechanism that enables the dazzlingly various and prolific world to spring forth.

Thus, the “Bosom,” for Thomson, is both generative and receptive, active and passive: it characterizes both the independent creation of substance (the transformation of air into rain) and the cooperative act of insemination. Thomson seems transfixed by the possibility of a “Bosom” that can independently generate, and also with the breast that can independently sustain and nourish its offspring. For Thomson, milk is both maternal and seminal, as evidenced by its metaphorical role as nourishing “sap.” He initially describes sap as “milky Nutriment” that feeds all “vegetable Life.”<sup>43</sup> Yet elsewhere in the poem, the explosion of sap is figured as a male sexual orgasm; addressing the “SOURCE OF BEINGS!,” the “UNIVERSAL SOUL,” Thomson writes:

At THY Command the vernal Sun awakes  
The torpid Sap, detruded to the Root  
By wintry Winds, that now in fluent Dance,  
And lively Fermentation, mounting, spreads

All this innumerable-colour'd Scene of things.”<sup>44</sup>

The now-virile sap “mount[s...]” and “spread[s...],” it explodes into a “fluent Dance,” a “lively Fermentation” that generates “All this innumerable-colour'd Scene of things.”

The cycles of generation, of copulation, of procreation, and of gestation are all collapsed, in *Spring*, into the doubly-gendered metaphor of the “Bosom” that is capable of both generation and sustenance. And while indeed the bosom is a powerfully feminine image, the constant confluence between the breast and semen seems to suggest that both male and female bodies are extraordinarily, scandalously mutable: semen is milky, and milk is seed. Thomson returns to this particular conflation again and again, as when he later suggests that both “the Drops of Rain” and the penetrating sunbeams “gave...birth” to the “ten thousand Delicacies, Herbs / And Fruits” that pour, unrestricted, from Nature’s ample “lap.”<sup>45</sup> In a poem where both the sun and rainclouds have been firmly and repeatedly sexed as male and female, respectively, the suggestion that such bodies are variable and fluid enough to be complicit in both the processes of birth and gestation is significant, as it troubles an otherwise oppositional view of gendered bodies. It is precisely this subversive, self-generating potential of matter that Jean-Joseph Goux describes in his work on sexual generation and the “stuff” of history. In order for the “materialist idea” to dominate intellectual history, matter -- conceived as its opposite, its Other -- must remain “dead.” However, without the organizing principle of seed, Goux suggests, matter is feared to propagate wildly and promiscuously into “an uncontrollable organic vitality,” where “nature, its accidents, its failures, work[s] in the pitch dark of shifting matter” to “organiz[e] itself.”<sup>46</sup> Goux’s formulation, in its reconsideration of

Aristotleian theories of sexual generation, resounds with seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century natural philosophies that also considered matter as actively moving and living. Thomson clearly has a similarly dynamic concept of nature in mind as he describes the vernal season.<sup>47</sup>

It is here, and among such “stuff,” that Hartford emerges into the scene. Indeed, as this self-proliferating, feminized, “shifting matter” is the landscape of *Spring*, it is thus also an unpredictable Nature that Hartford, as the simultaneously attractive and menacing “soft assemblage,” ultimately represents:

O HARTFORD, fitted, or to shine in Courts  
With unaffected Grace, or walk the Plain  
With Innocence and Meditation join'd  
In soft Assemblage, listen to my Song,  
Which thy own Season paints; when Nature all  
Is blooming and benevolent, like thee.<sup>48</sup>

A closer look at this invocation reveals the deeper anxiety that the imagery of maternity and mixture in the opening lines has prefigured: an anxiety about the male poet's role in the creation of his offspring. In *Spring*, the word “soft” not only connotes mutability, but a keen and emboldened sexuality: much later in the poem, a lambent maiden will fervidly -- and regrettably -- trust “betraying Man” with her “soft Minutes.”<sup>49</sup> Thomson's characterization of Hartford as a “soft Assemblage” is telling: she is titillating because she is demure and yet unnatural, constructed -- both inhibited and expansive. As a “soft

Assemblage,” she is able to mysteriously house both “Innocence and Meditation” within her body. The “soft Assemblage” recalls the same indefinable “shifting matter” -- an unrecognizable, foreign natural body -- that has characterized the self-propagating bosom of Nature.

But Thomson also describes Hertford as “fitted,” an interesting term that signifies both Thomson’s deference to Hertford as the “fit” and suitable subject of his poem, while also laying claim to her body-as-landscape, which is “Fitted” -- organized and encapsulated -- within the poem’s linguistic register as *his* defining and original image. In trying to “fit” her indescribable “Assemblage” within the lines of his poem, Thomson further underscores her autonomy from him: this is not, in other words, a willing confluence between Muse and poet, but a more forcible attempt at the interception of her pliable Nature. Still, Thomson’s effort to situate her in logical, controlled settings (in the court, or on the plain) are futile, and he must instead turn to the “all...blooming and benevolent” landscape to “paint[...]” her. As with the “mazy-running Soul of Melody” elsewhere in *Spring*, this image is simultaneously also Thomson’s “Song,” and so again the poetry is loosened from the poet, as the “Song” is “painted” by *her* Season, replicating again the struggle for poetic control within the new context of Thomson’s adulation for his Muse.

The phrase “soft assemblage” might also be a particularly apt characterization of Thomson’s distinctive form of poetry. As Patricia Meyer Spacks recognizes in her recent study of the genre, early eighteenth-century poetry seeks to restore the peace and balance so vilely disrupted in the seventeenth century through a careful negotiation of passion (the suggestive term “matters of feeling”), expressed through complexity: deep

contradictions and dense descriptive detail.<sup>50</sup> The poetry thus embodies, negotiates, and reconciles complexity through its formal compositions, its exhaustive linguistic registers, and its myriad contents. Yet Thomson's poetry, as recent work has shown, does not really attempt to reconcile its inherent ontological instabilities, but rather invites and probes complexity: meaning, form, and content are all slippery and slithery beasts, in *Spring*.<sup>51</sup> Sandro Jung notes that readers of Thomson, from the eighteenth century to the present day, have "censured the formal and methodological heterogeneity of *The Seasons*," in spite of a refusal to document what Jung views as a purposeful project of hybridity and mixture that characterizes this "blending of genres." Jung, not surprisingly, finds this project at its most striking height in *Spring*: the best representative example of this "blending" tendency is Thomson's work because it combines the hymnal and heroic tones of the ode with the dialectical/antithetical conventions of the epic and forms a "union" of these elements.<sup>52</sup>

Thomson's representations of subjectivity are, then, tied to his formal experimentation. There is a clear correspondence between Thomson's fantasized submission to -- and immersion in -- the mutable, feminized "stuff" of Nature and his aesthetics: what critics like Shaun Irlam have deemed his poetic "enthusiasm," the way in which the natural world, perceived as divine, simultaneously seems to overwhelm and inspire him.<sup>53</sup> In both cases, Thomson equates physical, emotional, and indeed sexual submission to a concupiscible Nature with his most prolific and creative moments as a poet, and yet -- as I have shown here -- these are also moments fraught with anxiety about the boundaries between the creator and his creation. Hertford presents Thomson with an impossible problem, one that must remain a contradiction: he must constantly struggle

with the demands of her patronage and of his unrequited love, and can never expect consummation or full gratification of his desires, nor full ownership of his poetry.

Yet this is not the case with Amanda Young, the woman whom Thomson courted in the 1740s and who proves a much less formidable presence in *Spring* because she comes to represent the more companionate aspects of sexual courtship and natural love. In the next section, I consider Thomson's incorporation of contemporary physico-theological ideas into his poetry, and consider how the model of the Newtonian spectrum, in particular, offers an alternative model of unity and meaning *within* the abundant and eroticized plenitude of Nature. This is a way, in other words, for Thomson to portray a relational self whose ability to be exceptional comes *from* a willing and mutual confluence with Nature's abundance, and not in opposition to it.

### **The Passions of Plenitude: Thomson, 'Amanda,' and the Erotics of Abundance**

At the time of *Spring*'s initial composition, the conception of the self as loosened, and thus embedded within a complex and dynamic natural system, was sanctioned by the contemporary physico-theological understanding of plenitude and its relationship to aesthetic pleasure, popularized by the writings of Joseph Addison in *The Spectator*.<sup>54</sup> Addison famously delights in the full absorption of the seeing "I"/eye in vast and sweeping prospects, where the eye can "*lose itself* amidst the variety of objects that offer themselves to its observation."<sup>55</sup> This gesture of self-effacement and absorption into the vast multitude of Nature is echoed in Addison's writings on plenitude in *Spectator* 519, where the myth of the self-enclosed human body is revealed to be a myriad of other parts

and “peoples.” Accounting for the “Infinity of Animals” that “stock” the “Material world,” Addison declares:

Every part of Matter is peopled: Every green Leaf swarms with Inhabitants. There is scarce a single Humour in the Body of a Man, or of any other Animal, in which our Glasses do not discover Myriads of living Creatures...we find in the most solid Bodies, as in Marble it self, innumerable Cells and Cavities that are crouded with such imperceptible Inhabitants, as are too little for the naked Eye to discover.<sup>56</sup>

As Addison demonstrates here, the eighteenth-century understanding of plenitude is not anthropocentric, but in fact an almost grotesque integration of the human into the “crouded” divine world s/he inhabits.<sup>57</sup> While Addison does laud “Man” as a “wonderful” creature “that deserves our particular Attention,” it is only because man so obviously and consciously embodies his own expansive liminality as the *nexus utriusque mundi*: he “who fills up the middle Space between the Animal and the Intellectual Nature, the visible and the invisible World.”<sup>58</sup>

Given the permissive and expansive definition of what it means to be human in Thomson’s world, and the resonances between such a model and the “posthumanist” subjectivities outlined in my introduction, I argue in this section that sexuality -- represented through the courtship of Young -- becomes, in a very significant and meaningful sense, the product of an ontological “middle space.” This is, in other words, a pleasure generated by a world *so full* that one cannot immediately distinguish between



self and other, and that encourages abundant and fruitful connections between beings and things. As I will show in this section, Thomson incorporates a number of physico-theological ideas about plenitude into his throbbing and eroticized vision of the natural world. And while his characterization of the “I”/eye as simultaneously *looking at* and *being in* this “crouded” world demonstrates Thomson’s profound unease at the potential for a feminized Nature to supplant and disrupt his poetic vision and, by extension, his phallogentric sexual fantasy, ultimately it is the ways in which Thomson is able to work, write, and create *through* plenitude that render him an exceptional figure in the world of the poem.

My reading begins in the spring of 1727, when Thomson is conceiving and first drafting *Spring*. He is concurrently writing his eulogy to Newton, *A Poem Sacred to the Memory of Sir Isaac Newton*, and it is in this poem that Thomson first theorizes Newton’s spectrum of light as an analogy for the natural ebb and flow of the seasons, with the poet “collecting every ray” that “to the charm’d eye educed the gorgeous train / Of parent colours.”<sup>59</sup> “First,” Thomson muses, “the flaming Red / Sprung vivid forth” -- the onset of spring a passionate, voluptuous color, which ultimately tempers to a “delicious yellow,” nestling into the “kind beams of an all-refreshing Green” in the lazy, luxuriant days of summer. Autumn is characterized by “pure Blue,” the color of its “swell[ing]...skies” that eventually “deepen[...]

to “Indico,” as the “heavy-skirted evening” acts as the first indication of coming winter. Finally, “the last gleamings of refracted light” signal the full weight of the frost; the violet “dye[s],” “faints” away at the opposite end of the spectrum from its sister purple, red. The speaker’s “charm’d eye,” trailing each subtle transition, is enraptured as the prism “untwist[s]” each individually

painted strand. Finally, the reabsorption of the individual colors into the infinite, white spectrum: the “myriads of mingling dyes” -- and thus, the indistinguishably subtle shades of every season -- dissolve into white sunlight, the “infinite source / Of beauty, ever blushing, ever new.”<sup>60</sup>

Of white sunlight, in his own papers on the spectrum Newton says it “is an aggregate of an infinite variety of homogeneous colors.” The use of the word “aggregate” emphasizes what, for Newton, is a crucial point -- the “homogeneous colours” that make up the spectrum of white light (red, yellow, green, blue, purple, and violet) are “primitive or original” in that they are, themselves, unmixed.<sup>61</sup> What begins as an individual, “original” part subsumes itself among the infinite other parts, and thus this particular kind of mixture only happens at the most inclusive collective level. Newton’s influence, here, cannot be overstated: for Thomson, this will become a powerful model for a composite self, a self that is able to siphon and embody the expansive natural world, rather than be subsumed by it. In *Spring*, Thomson makes explicit reference to the “white mingling maze” of Newton’s spectrum but also incorporates it figuratively into his vision of the mixed, various world at the peak of its bloom:

Oft let me wander o’er the dewy Fields,  
Where Freshness breathes, and dash the trembling Drops  
From the bent Bush, as thro’ the verdant Maze  
Of sweet-Briar Hedges I pursue my Walk...  
And see the Country, far-diffus’d around,

*One boundless Blush, one white-empurpled Shower*  
*Of mingled blossoms...*<sup>62</sup>

Compressed into the sublimity of that “one white-empurpled shower / Of mingled blossoms” is a model for the collective of Nature in Thomson: a flexible and synergistic “one” that is manifest only in mingled “many,” just as the distinct colors are inherent in -- but also separable from -- the mingled “white” of Newton’s “infinite source.” For Newton, white light can *only* be derived from the infinite variation and interplay of pure, unmixed colors.<sup>63</sup> Further, while the eye actually perceives “white,” this white is both “white” *and* infinitely imperceptible shades of red, yellow, green, blue and purple: both many and one simultaneously. For Thomson, equally, *Spring*’s infinite variety comprises the whole and suggests its parts. To perceive one element is thus to perceive it all as one connected universe *and* to perceive only one element, and this fluid epistemology is what motivates the vitalist project Reill sees emerging in the latter half of the eighteenth century.<sup>64</sup> Addison’s “peopled” bodies resonate again here: bodies that are figuratively and perceptively whole, but found to be teeming with multitudes of other beings.

It is fitting, I think, that the verse I’ve cited above contains the first “I” of the poem -- the first embedded spectator -- because it is in this verse that Thomson’s enthusiasm for this kind of mixture reaches a feverish pitch. Released from “the Town / Buried in Smoke, and Sleep,” the thrilled poet “pursue[s] [his] Walk” in the country, a rather quotidian activity and certainly conventionally pastoral. Even prior to the conjunction “Or,” however, where we will see a remarkable shift in focus, there are clues that the “Walk” will transform into something more extraordinary. The walk carves

through a “verdant Maze / of Sweet-briar Hedges,” an image of entanglement and irregularity; further, as the poet winds through the damp fields he experiences moisture as simultaneously an expansive, ubiquitous element (“wander[ing]” free “o’er the dewy Fields”) and as a minute, “trembling Drop [...],” so delicate and sensitive that it is “dash[ed]” by his touch. This image is subtly sexual: the image of “trembling” recalls a virginal, timid sensibility, particularly when read against the phallic image of the poet “dash[ing]” apart the dewdrop with his fingertip. Thomson, here, wants to emphasize the “I”/eye as separate from the landscape, as seeming to reciprocally *affect* it, but this ability to shape and change its matter so easily and effortlessly seems to dissolve with the vulnerable dew. The conjunctive split wheels the poet from a quiet “Walk” into a sweeping synaesthesia, first confounding his senses: he “taste[s] the Smell of Dairy.”<sup>65</sup> Then suddenly London (“AUGUSTA”) rises “Eminen[t]” in the landscape, collapsing the prior geographical distinction between the “Town” and the “Fields.” London is transformed into “Plains,” and from here the poet’s “I”/eye is snatched even further back to a wider prospect from which he “see[s]” all of England, “the Country” as it “diffus[es]” into “One boundless Blush, one white-empurpled Shower / Of mingled Blossoms.” The seeing eye, however, recalling Addison, is not separate from this immense prospect, but deeply enmeshed within it: it is “*where* the raptur’d Eye / Hurries from Joy to Joy.” Thomson here plays on the double significance of “where,” which designates both the act of looking and is an indicator of place. The “I”/eye simultaneously looks at and is a part of this diffusive landscape. As if to emphasize how extensive and expansive this leveling tendency is, Thomson closes the scene with an image of Autumn, “hid beneath / The fair Profusion”: *Spring* is so expansively gestative

that the nascent harvest is already, in some sense, present, and so spring and autumn coexist in both time and space.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, like the Newtonian spectrum, the landscape of Thomson's *Spring* comprises an almost breathtaking array of minutia, but ultimately collapses into a vibrant uniformity. The spectrum represents both conflation and confluence, and likewise -- at the height of its rapturous consummation -- the landscape incorporates and diffuses its discrete elements. This is a moment in which nature seems to overwhelm the poet-speaker, and yet Thomson's language is less imagistic at strategic points, emphasizing order through the vertical accumulation of details rather than a more horizontal heterogeneity: the eye "Hurries from Joy to Joy," for example, a phrase that gives the appearance of overwhelming variety but does so by a mediating repetition. Thomson uses this technique again only a few lines later when he describes the "Myriads on Myriads" of "Insect-Armies," and it recurs at numerous other points in the poem: moments like the one above, I would argue, when Nature seems to press a bit too closely, and the poem's narrative of description threatens to be lost entirely.<sup>67</sup> The grouping of "Joys," for example, collapses innumerable individual elements into one unifying, if abstract, universal.

Thomson's use of periphrasis suggests a similar impulse: it yokes several descriptors together to form a singular image of a particular subject.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, particularizing phrases such as "the Cruel Raptures of the Savage Kind" (animal sex) and the "umbrageous Multitude of Leaves" (the forest) seemingly oppose themselves to the collapsing impulses of words like the "myriads" or "joy."<sup>69</sup> However, Keenleyside's reading reminds us that periphrasis in Thomson often serves to "confound," rather than to

sharpen, the taxonomic categories of *Spring*.<sup>70</sup> Thus while periphrasis -- the technique by which Thomson meaningfully clusters his lines with excessive descriptors, what Samuel Johnson famously censured as Thomson's "filling the ear more than the mind" -- diagnoses a loss of unity, as it troubles the presumed distinctions that might separate and divide individual categories by demonstrating the extent to which they are inevitably interrelated and perceived as aggregate.<sup>71</sup>

What Thomson's interpretation of the spectrum's tension between the homogeneous and the heterogeneous enacts is a struggle for figurative and semiotic control: in other words, questioning if and how one can condense into the medium of poetry the seemingly indescribable infinity of plenitude. Thomson explicitly poses this problem at another point in the poem:

But who can paint  
Like Nature? Can Imagination boast,  
Amid its gay Creation, Hues like hers?  
Or can it mix them with that matchless Skill,  
And lose them in each other, as appears  
In every Bud that blows? If Fancy then  
Unequal fails beneath the pleasing Task;  
Ah, what shall Language do? Ah, where find Words  
Ting'd with so many Colours...<sup>72</sup>

What Thomson proposes, here, is a two-layered problem in composing and representing plenitude: the initial difficulty in imagining, or conceptualizing, Nature and the related, additional problem of then rendering such a vision in the limited medium of poetic language. Thomson registers this “fail[ure]” as a taxonomical or categorical limitation in both cases: the human intellect cannot “mix” as ingeniously or as subtly, nor can it sift as carefully the myriad, imperceptible shades of difference -- the “Ting[es],” as it were -- that natural phenomena possess.

“Yet,” Thomson consoles himself, “tho’ successful, will the Toil delight.”<sup>73</sup> It is the perverse pleasures of the “Toil,” and markedly not its fruition, that “delight[s]” the poet -- the same creative mantra that will inform, among other things, the libertine Lovelace’s protracted sexual pursuit of Clarissa, when he reassures his comrade Belford that “*preparation* and *expectation* are in a manner everything,” while “the *fruition*, what is there in that?”<sup>74</sup> While I will discuss the perversity inherent in Lovelace’s dogged pursuit of novelty at some length in the next chapter, let me now assert the resonance of the same claim for Thomson, whose almost obsessive revisions of the *Seasons* testify to the pleasures of the “Toil”: for Thomson, also, it is demonstrably “everything.” Indeed, in what follows, I will argue that Thomson’s fruitless yet earnest pursuit of his real-life lover, Elizabeth Young -- the Amanda of *Spring* -- exemplifies the possibilities of infinite pleasures even in nominal impotence, and, by extension, helps Thomson regain a sense of self-purpose in his representation of that idealized courtship through the creation and ordering of unresponsive, wild natural plenitude.

While at his patron George Lyttleton’s seat at Hagley, where he was actively revising *Spring*, Thomson wrote to Young:

I often sit, and with a dear exquisite Mixture of Pleasure and Pain, of all that Love can boast of excellent and tender, think of you... Whereever I am, and however employed, I can never cease to think of my loveliest Miss Young. You are Part of my Being; you mix with all my Thoughts, even the most studious, and instead of disturbing, give them greater Harmony and Spirit.<sup>75</sup>

Loving Young was more pain than pleasure: the courtship was one-sided, Thomson was repeatedly rejected, and Young ultimately married another man. What Thomson describes here as the typically masochistic physical sensations of “Pleasure” mixed with “Pain” corresponds to the abstract mixture of his “Thoughts,” so that he imagines himself sharing a consciousness with Young that “give[s]” his own imagination “greater Harmony and Spirit.” While Thomson does not generally privilege one type of mixture (material or abstract, corporeal or epistemological) over another, in this letter he establishes a clear trajectory that reflects his pursuit of and desire for Young. As Young first pervades his “Being” as sensation, and then moves to the more abstract realm of “mix[ing] with” his “Thoughts,” she transforms them -- and him -- in a way that is analogous to his own desire for her to read *Spring* as *her* love song: he sends her a copy in hopes that she will see herself in and through his poetry, and be thus convinced to share “this happy picture” with him.

Thomson’s competing desire for both unity and variety in love -- urged in a strange image that almost recalls the archaic, fungible “one-sex” body that Thomas



Laqueur argues loses prominence in the eighteenth-century -- emerges again in this depiction of Young.<sup>76</sup> His declaration that she is “Part of [his] Being” -- both physiologically and emotionally -- is more than mere romantic convention. Young is not simply an additional limb, or a heightened sense, but is absorbed into Thomson, both in body and in mind -- so much so, in fact, that Thomson fantasizes them as sharing one “Being.” Further, this amorous mixing does not “disturb[...]” him but instead allows for “greater Harmony and Spirit.” The play on “Spirit,” which denotes both an animating principle and a seminal life-force, further reinforces the mixture of thoughts as suggestively copulatory. Like the spectrum, mixture produces anew from a synthesis of difference. And although such a reading might seem to suggest, rather sinisterly, that Thomson simply fantasizes about consuming Young fully and subjugating both her body and mind, it is important to note that he portrays himself as equally helpless in the face of this all-absorbing process: he can “never cease” his thoughts, and this “dear exquisite Mixture” haunts him “wherever” he is, “however employed.” Thus, for Thomson, the image of mixture transforms his “Being” into something that is simultaneously both *his* (“my Being,” “my Thoughts”) and *theirs*. Here Thomson lays the most particularized aspect of his self -- his poetic ability -- at Young’s feet, claiming that is only through his connection with and to her that he is able to distinguish himself as a poet.

It is thus fitting that the verse I have cited above, in which Thomson represents the poet as pleasurably impotent in the act of poetic creation, prepares the reader to receive Amanda. At first, Amanda and her lover are presented to the eroticized and throbbing world of the poem as two visionaries, with the poet-speaker, now confident and directive, focusing Amanda’s gaze. First, when Amanda comes “with those downcast

Eyes, sedate and sweet / Those looks demure, that deeply pierce the Soul,” it is the speaker who turns her gaze outward into receptive Nature.<sup>77</sup> For Amanda’s “looks demure” are initially disconcerting and defensive: she either looks down (thus, separating herself from the world) or looks too aggressively, “pierc[ing]” the “Soul.” In both instances, these misguided looks sever her from a Nature poised to receive and titillate her. And thus the speaker seeks to redirect her keen gaze, coaxing her to watch as the season suggestively reveals itself:

See, where the winding Vale her lavish Stores,  
 Irriguous, spreads. See, how the Lilly drinks  
 The latent Rill, scarce oozing thro’ the Grass,  
 Of Growth luxuriant; or the humid Bank,  
 In fair Profusion, decks.<sup>78</sup>

The speaker reappropriates her gaze by turning it outward into the increasingly more seductive scene unfolding before them (“See...See”).<sup>79</sup> And, indeed what the lovers see, together, is not only a provocative prospect, but in fact themselves reflected in the natural world -- precisely the narcissistic impulse diagnosed by Mulvey’s concept of the dialectical gaze.<sup>80</sup> So “while the rosy-footed May / Steals blushing on,” the two lovers “wind[...]” through the “Vale.”<sup>81</sup> As Amanda has just “grace[d]” her “braided Hair” with flowers, so the “fair Profusion” also “decks” the “humid Bank,” whose “Grass[es]...Grow[...] luxuriant.”<sup>82</sup> And, as they “together...tread / The Morning-Dews,” the “latent Rill” suggestively “ooz[es] thro’ the Grass,” provocatively

“spread[ing]” itself as the “Lily drinks” up the moisture. As Amanda traces the gaze of the “I”/eye, she enmeshes herself further in the poem.

Further into the passage, the evocative drinking and sucking behaviors not only continue, but expand, as the “fervent Bees / In swarming Millions...Cling to the Bud, and, with inserted Tube, / Suck its pure essence...”<sup>83</sup> What Amanda and her lover properly “See” in Nature, then, is not only the reflection of their own erotic desire, but its enactment, its consummation. And Thomson seeks to preserve that sense of communion by fleshing out scenes of Nature as collective, collaborative and mutual: the “Lilly” is a beneficiary, quenched by the “Rill” concealed among the “luxuriant” grass, while the “humid Bank” more ostentatiously flaunts its proximity to the life-giving and dynamic energies of the water.

As the prospect shifts to detail the “fair Profusion” of flora, the speaker and Amanda seem to disappear from the scene, subsumed by the universalizing “hurried Eye” that, as before, struggles to take account of the “endless Bloom” of Nature.<sup>84</sup> (Indeed, this same line also recalls the “verdant Maze” and the “bowery Walk” of Thomson’s earlier prospect, suggesting his affinity for recycling the same imagery.<sup>85</sup>) The “hurried Eye,” which has, “Distracted,” roamed the broad prospects of “Vistas”-- the “ethereal Mountain, and the distant Main” -- is called back to watch, entranced, as Nature’s striptease begins.<sup>86</sup> Here I quote Thomson at some length:

...why so far excursive? when at Hand,  
Along these blushing Borders, bright with Dew,

And in yon mingled Wilderness of Flowers  
 Fair-handed Spring unbosoms every Grace:  
 Throws out the Snow-drop, and the Crocus first;  
 The Daisy, Primrose, Violet darkly blue,  
 And Polyanthus of unnumber'd Dyes;  
 The yellow Wall-Flower, stain'd with iron Brown;  
 And lavish Stock that Scents the Garden round.  
 From the soft Wing of vernal Breezes shed,  
 Anemonies; Auriculas, enrich'd  
 With shining Meal o'er all their velvet Leaves;  
 And full Renunculas, of glowing Red.  
 Then comes the Tulip-Race, where Beauty plays  
 Her idle Freaks: from Family diffus'd  
 To Family, as flies the Father Dust,  
 The varied Colours run; and, while they *break*  
 On the charm'd Eye, th' exulting Florist marks,  
 With secret Pride the Wonders of his Hand.<sup>87</sup>

Spring, manifest in its sexualized “blushing Borders, bright with Dew,” bares herself by “unbosom[ing] every Grace”: in short, performing a seduction by slowly releasing her “mingled Wilderness of Flowers.” Yet in this depiction of Nature’s lascivious plenitude, Thomson embeds a struggle between what feminists like Donna Haraway recognize as a phallogocentric impulse to organize and name the taxonomic categories of each flower, and

the disorder, negligence, and resistance to categorization the blossoms themselves exhibit.<sup>88</sup> Thomson seems both troubled and thrilled by the ways in which Nature resists and fulfills these applied categories, whether scientific or figurative.

The passage begins with the independent and self-enclosed “Snow-drop” and “Crocus,” both of which make a logical and unremarkable initial appearance. The intimate coupling should remind the reader of Amanda and her poet-lover, who also enter into the scene as bonded individuals set apart from the “blooming” bosom of Nature. These flowers are subsumed by the slightly less systematic groupings of “Daisy, Primrose, Violet,” who share the stage with the “Polyanthus,” a flower actually cultivated to be a hybrid, and thus it begins to cast more unpredictable, yet stunning, “Dyes” forth into the mix.<sup>89</sup> The polyanthus prefaces the increasingly more mixed flora, succeeded by the “Wall-Flower,” described as “stain’d” with “Brown,” and the “Auriculas,” who are equally mutable, “enrich’d” by the “shining Meal o’er all their velvet Leaves.” The “mingled Wilderness” begins to slowly reveal itself, as mixture is increasingly privileged over purity, and yet Thomson chooses as the culmination of this promiscuous commixing the “Tulip-Race”: a cohesive category that is marked by its “Idle Freaks,” its ancestry and heritage so “diffus’d” among various “Families” as to make the origins of any given plant unrecognizable. They “run” into one another with “varied Colours.”<sup>90</sup> As the blooms frenetically multiply, the organized and categorical vision overwhelms the poet-speaker, who then collapses these flowers into the transcendent “Infin[it]y” of “Numbers, Delicacies, Smells,” succumbing to “the Breath of Nature and her endless Bloom.”<sup>91</sup>

Amanda and the poet-speaker have effectively dissolved into the scene; at least, there is no clearly demarcated vantage-point from which the couple, and thus the reader,

“see.” The “endless Bloom” of flora seem to occupy the poem’s every space, crowding the lines and filling the page apparently independent of the poet. However, if I may be humbly permitted to snatch my reader’s eye back from such a vast prospect, I would call her attention to the almost indiscernible figure of the “exulting Florist” who looms throughout the passage: particularly, to his hand. Indeed, the passage begins by describing this profuse bloom of flowers as “at Hand,” as immediately available to and coexistent with the speaker moving through the garden. And, as we proceed through the passage, the language of the hand recurs throughout: Spring is described as “fair-handed,” she “throws out” the flowers, and even the “vernal Breezes” are figured as “soft Wing[s].”<sup>92</sup> All these hands, then, comprise the “Wonders of [the Florist’s] Hand.” Read against the “charm’d Eye,” whose effect is to separate from -- “*break*” -- and thus further scatter the “varied Colours,” it is the “Hand” that tries to “mark,” that wants to collect, situate and make sense of all these myriad “Wonders.” Further, Thomson’s syntax here is telling: “the Wonders of his Hand” explicitly describes his part in cultivating these flowers, but also locates the flowers as “of his Hand,” cramming all of this infinitude into the tiny lines of a human body part. Thus the “Florist” does not produce what he is not always-already a part of; he is visible in every nook and cranny of the exploding garden, and, curiously, he remains remarkably *invisible* in the motley scene. What seems to be, in this passage, a profusion of variety so remarkably dense and diverse is found to be reducible to a single human hand, but a hand that is paradoxically lost in the profusion it has bred.<sup>93</sup>

It is just such an image that recalls, again, Addison’s notion of plenitude – even the individual “Humour” is found to be teeming with multitudes – and just such a

“Florist” that embodies the subtle, if tenuous, ownership Thomson struggles to take over his “Toils.” Indeed, while the florist may ultimately find his task impossible, his “secret Pride” testifies to the pleasures of his work, in

[t]he Negligence of *Nature*, wide, and wild;  
Where, undisguis’d by mimic *Art*, she spreads  
Unbounded Beauty to the roving Eye.<sup>94</sup>

Amanda reappears again, suggestively as the “panting Muse,” after the “UNIVERSAL BEING” has “Command[ed] the vernal Sun” to “awake[n] / The Torpid Sap.”<sup>95</sup> This moment is undeniably triumphant: when before the sap’s impotence and inadequacy was marked by its torpidity and its sluggishness, it is now suddenly so formidably virile as to “mount[...]

and “spread[...]

/ All this innumerable-colour’d Scene of things.”<sup>96</sup> And Amanda’s “panting,” ostensibly the result of her swift ascension alongside the poet’s “Theme,” also implies a sexual satisfaction, suggestive after the orgiastic release of sap. Amanda is then effectively reabsorbed into the continuation of the “Theme;” the “*Passion of the Groves*” will, in fact, repeat the cycle of titillating variety resisting and then embracing the climax of enthusiastic unity, this time with sexy songbirds that replace the flirting flora.<sup>97</sup> Amanda -- unlike the poet-speaker -- does not transcend the space and time of *Spring*, but is in fact ever more deeply enmeshed in it. Similarly, the “Theme” does not transcend *Spring*’s genre and content, but is revealed to have been its source all along, just as the embryonic Autumn is always tucked away within the springtime landscape. As I have shown, the fantasy Thomson projects here is of a

struggle between the mechanisms of mixture and of fusion that underlie the “negligent” natural world. It is also, as we might come to expect, a fantasy of a self in aggregate: all of this profusion is revealed to be the work of one “Hand.” Indeed, in this moment of fusion, the poet-speaker lays explicit claim to his theme, his verse, and his “panting Muse.”<sup>98</sup> Through this fantasy of perpetual union, then, Thomson is able to differentiate himself: the Muse, in stark contrast to the controlled and distanced Hertfordian version, is now exhausted, clambering to keep up with his prolific imagery.

Accordingly, other representations of plenitude in the poem are found to identify a single, unifying origin from which the intensely variable natural world bursts forth. So the “rich soil” of the British isles is transformed into the “Exuberant,” “better Blessings” that “pour / O’er every land” and “the naked Nations cloath.” Thomson situates the heart of a complex and sprawling system of international trade in the benevolence of Britain, “th’ exhaustless Granary of a World!”<sup>99</sup> The language of plenty -- “rich,” “exuberant,” “exhaustless” -- animates and vitalizes the encapsulating soil. And the “penetrative Sun” exerts his “Force deep-darting to the dark Retreat / Of Vegetation,” an implicitly sexual image that ignites and fertilizes the spring grasses and flora, “set[ting] the steaming Power / At large, to wander o’er the vernant Earth, / In various Hues.”<sup>100</sup> Again, natural plenitude is given a phallic origin in the “penetrative” rays of the sun, and though the exhaustive energies of the natural world may be characterized by their diffusion and their amorphousness, they spring from an original, identifiable, and potent moment of focus and concentration. Yet other moments in the poem show less confidence and certainty in the mechanisms of Nature, and quite tellingly, these are moments that depict an intensely maternal and feminized Nature. Thomson admires, for example, “Nature’s swift and



secret-working Hand” as it readies the garden for “the promis’d Fruit,” “yet a little Embryo, unperceiv’d, / Within its crimson Folds.”<sup>101</sup> Even more perplexing are the moments in which detritus reveals itself as a self-consuming plenitude, and decay, waste, and death must also replicate and embody the teeming variety so deeply associated with life in *Spring*.<sup>102</sup>

Accordingly, in such moments the poet insists on how he can become creatively and productively overwhelmed by the variety in the universe, locating himself *in*, rather *than as external* to, the perpetual flux of its elements:

...catch thy self the Landskip, gliding swift  
Athwart Imagination’s vivid Eye:  
Or by the vocal Woods and Waters lull’d,  
And lost in lonely Musing, in a Dream,  
Confus’d, of careless Solitude, where mix  
Ten thousand wandering Images of Things,  
Soothe every Gust of Passion into Peace,  
All but the Swellings of a soften’d Heart,  
That waken, not disturb the tranquil Mind.<sup>103</sup>

Though the “Landskip glid[es] swift” across the eye, one can “catch” it, and though the “Mind” is “Confus’d,” “lost,” and “lonely,” it is the “mix” of “Ten thousand wandering Images of Things” that “Soothe every Gust of Passion into Peace,” “Swell[ing]” the “Heart” and “waken[ing]” the “tranquil Mind.” Though the overarching sensation -- that

of confusion and disorder -- remains the same in the captivated viewer, here it is recast as an integral and indeed constructive part of the creative process, a moment of inspiration and connection rather than one of isolation or of despair. Indeed, Thomson's "soften'd Heart," while distinguishing itself from the landscape, participates in a common and communal project of rendering the mind "tranquil." Thomson's reassertion of poetic production as vital and active, even in its seeming indolence, reaffirms the poet as the center of the "Landskip" that he captures, with all of its "negligent" elements cooperating in the single and exceptional effort to soothe and encourage him, thus acknowledging the poet as simultaneously their source and their product. By distinguishing the poet from the landscape, Thomson thus opens the possibility of individual autonomy, but only at the moment in which he finds himself fully embedded within a natural plenitude.

It is evident that Thomson, to varying degrees throughout the poem, struggles with a sexed body-as-landscape that he finds both disturbing and alluring, both inspirational and oppressive. Thomson is initially overwhelmed by the Muse of *Spring* and unable to overcome his sense of estrangement and distance from his own poetic creation. To help assuage his anxieties about the source of his poetic production, Thomson then tries to locate himself within the eroticized landscape and aims to possess, organize, and represent it, but, tellingly, through an appropriately destabilizing model of creative confluence rather than a clear assertion of mastery. To underscore the persistence of both modes of seduction in Thomson's thinking, I look at two of the culminating scenes of *Spring*, both of which describe the effects of the vernal season on *human* lovers. The first portrait describes an unrequited love made perverse by its exploitation of youthful ingenuousness: this is sexual love grounded in opposition, and

models -- in reverse -- Thomson's earnest and innocent pursuit of Hertford. The second portrait, however, imagines confluence -- the coming together of like and equal partners -- as the highest expression of the self, and is accordingly the poem's final and lasting image.

### **Conclusion: The Look of Love**

Two images of unrequited love -- male and female -- form the penultimate scene of Thomson's *Spring*; I will focus here on the first. It juxtaposes the ripening desire of a lambent young maiden against the perverse and self-serving passion of a rake. The virgin, "Flush'd by the Spirit of the genial Year," is described in highly-suggestive language:

Her Lips blush deeper Sweets; she breathes of Youth;  
The shining Moisture swells into her Eyes,  
In brighter Flow; her wishing Bosom heaves,  
With palpitations wild; kind Tumults seize  
Her Veins, and all her yielding Soul is Love.<sup>104</sup>

The maiden assumes the characteristics of a moist flower at the peak of its bloom, mixing the pinkish "live Carnation" of her complexion with a deeper and more robust blush, signaling the onset of her sexual receptivity, where "all her yielding Soul is Love." This desire is concentrated by her "keen Gaze" but her lover cannot meet her eye. He "turns away / Full of the dear ecstatic Power, and Sick / With sighing Languishment," himself

as erotic and sensitive as she.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, despite the youth's virility -- he is "Full...of Power" -- he is also "Sick / With sighing Languishment," a feminized image that connotes his reluctant evasion of her bold and "keen" desire, and, further, underscores the perversity of his erotic response. Accordingly, a warning to the "Fair" follows immediately:

Be greatly cautious of your sliding Hearts:  
Dare not th' infectious Sigh; the pleading Look,  
Down-cast, and low, in meek Submission drest,  
But full of Guile. Let not the fervent Tongue,  
Prompt to deceive, with Adulation smooth,  
Gain on your purpos'd Will.<sup>106</sup>

The juxtaposition of a "keen gaze" against a "pleading Look, / Down-cast, and low," the reader may recall, is again precisely how Amanda's defensive and contradictory look is described upon her introduction into the poem, and, further, a misdirected or distracted gaze has also been, throughout the poem, associated with sexual passivity. Thus the emphasis on looking as evasive or as deflective, in this passage, indicates a deeply troubling sexual perversity, particularly given its association with the otherwise virile male lover. Indeed, though the maiden and rake share many of the same outward characteristics, they are ultimately driven together by two separate and oppositional forces: genuine affection and sinister duplicity, respectively. Thus, Thomson represents their anticipated commingling as appalling and unnatural. The deceitfulness of the rake

underscores his separation and distance from the willing lover, even as her heart “slides” into his.

Thomson contrasts this intimate portrait with another, happier vision, of two lovers connubially joined “in one Fate” by “Their Hearts, their Fortunes, and their Beings,” which all “blend” together.<sup>107</sup> To enjoy this kind of bliss, the lovers must first turn from the depraved demands of modern society:

‘Tis not the coarser Tie of human Laws,  
Unnatural oft, and foreign to the Mind,  
That binds their Peace, but Harmony itself,  
Attuning all their Passions into Love...<sup>108</sup>

Thomson rejects the “coarser Tie of human Laws” -- laws that demand restrictively-defined contract and obligation, laws that “unnatural[ly]” join two inherently discrete beings -- in favor of physical and emotional “Harmony,” a mutual sentiment that “Attun[es]” *all* “Passions into Love.” Earlier in the poem, individual “Passions” are known to “burst their Bounds,” gratuitously and promiscuously commixing in ways analogous to the social perversities Thomson rejects, proliferating selfishly instead of synthesizing productively:

...a thousand mix’d Emotions more,  
From ever-changing Views of Good and Ill,  
Form’d infinitely various, vex the Mind

With endless Storm.<sup>109</sup>

Such a persistent insistence on passions self-directed and thus separate from the productive “Attuning...into Love” enable disproportion and thus gross abuses in the name of love: Thomson references, in particular, an “ungenerous” man who, “alone intent / To bless himself, from sordid Parents buys / The loathing Virgin,” or the lover and her rake in the scene prior.<sup>110</sup> For Thomson, the legal contract of marriage is insignificant without the promise of true, mutual feeling, or the “Sympathy of Soul” found in a perfect union with another being: “Thought meeting Thought, and Will preventing Will, / With boundless Confidence: for nought but Love / Can answer Love...”<sup>111</sup> The evolution of Thomson’s accumulative technique (“Myriads upon Myriads”) is evident here: by underscoring sameness and connection, two equal selves meet each other with “boundless Confidence,” as “Love...answers Love.”

And as each lover comes together, they match each other ever more perfectly in sentiment, in intellect, and in physical desire. Political differences are erased and replaced by mutuality of feeling, which perpetuates their eventual bliss. Again, the moment of sexual consummation is one in which the lover is stripped of his individual identity and becomes part of a collective Self: Thomson ends *Spring* with such an image, as “the happiest of their kind!” will “Together...sink in social sleep / Together freed...”<sup>112</sup> In an earlier version of *Spring*, the final lines show a couple who has been eying sexualized Nature freely and then bring this arousal into the bedroom, where it transforms from carnality to a shared spirituality, with “soul approach[ing] soul” in the marital bed.<sup>113</sup> But the union of souls is only implicit in this version, with the word

“approach” suggesting that full consummation is, finally, impossible. Not so in the 1746 edition of *Spring*, post-Young:

When after the long vernal Day of Life,  
Enamour'd more, as more Remembrance swells  
With many a Proof of recollected Love,  
Together down they sink in social Sleep;  
Together freed, their gentle Spirits fly  
To Scenes where Love and Bliss immortal reign.<sup>114</sup>

What formerly was imagined as merely the capacity for consummation has been replaced by what we now recognize as a potent metaphor for total fusion: the shared gaze. The pair, as of one mind and one mutual “Remembrance,” *re-collect* all the “Proof” of “Love” that *Spring* has offered -- the images “consenting SPRING / Sheds...on their Heads” -- and on the wings of that force launch themselves into Heaven, where “Scenes [of] Love and Bliss immortal reign.”<sup>115</sup> This collective memory of “Love” is full with the scenes of “All various Nature pressing on the Heart,” the whole of a polymorphously erogenous universe infusing the sentimentalized lovers as they “join together” in their (death-)bed. These lovers have abandoned all social, legal, and gendered difference in a “Love” that eschews these “coarser Ties” in favor of sublime unintelligibility. The lover returns “Love” for “Love,” “Thought” for “Thought,” and “Will” for “Will.” In short, the lover -- enraptured, titillated, and comforted -- looks everywhere but sees only the comfort of self, a self that is blissfully and comfortingly in composite and in union.

James Thomson once described this final image to Elizabeth Young in a letter. Dedicating his vision of perfect and mutual bliss to her, he hoped that one day such unimaginable happiness might be theirs. It would never be. Young rejected Thomson harshly and married another man. The illustrious and romantic poet of the *Seasons* never found his love. He died, heartbroken and alone, of a fever at age forty-eight.



## Chapter Two

### *Clarissa: Collective Relations and the Evasion of Sexual Autonomy*

My previous chapter argued that, for James Thomson, autonomy is possible but undesirable, as he finally envisions self-definition as the erotic result of a full and complete merging of two beings. Thus, while the end of the poem rests in a more comforting and companionate model of affection, it is still one that resists opposition by incorporating the natural collective into its representation of human relationships. The eroticized universe of *Spring*, perpetually expanding and contracting, oscillates between the localized musings of the poet-speaker and the effusive plenitude of a resplendent nature. Both of these impulses come to infuse the poem's culminating relationship, which perfects to an indistinguishable unity the communion between beings and things.

As in *Spring*, Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748-9) renders the particularized subjectivity of its eponymous heroine through two concurrent registers: one that offers intimate, localized expressions of feeling and the other that records externalized, eroticized relationships to "others": in this case, family, friends, and suitors. While in my reading I will largely privilege the second register -- arguing that Clarissa is, in fact, a character resistant to autonomy and thus determined by her relationships -- I also contend that this desire for relationships with others enables Clarissa to self-define, and to become the distinctive "exemplar of her sex." Her relational sense of self, I argue, resonates significantly less with the Puritanical transcendence and "unity" that has historically characterized Clarissa since, at least, Ian Watt. Further, such a reading denies the characterization of her relationship with the libertine Lovelace as oppositional by

aligning her with his project of spontaneous and fleeting affinities, relations that confirm her exceptional sense of self. The project of this chapter is not only to align, but also to invert the novel's typical energies: I focus on how Lovelace, a polyamorous rake, finds himself defined by one monogamous intrigue, while Clarissa, the sexually virtuous woman, becomes increasingly defined by her steady stream of erotic intimacies.

Indeed, while the poet-speaker of *Spring* still seeks to preserve some semblance of autonomy -- however anxiously and ambivalently -- Clarissa, in recognizing the perils of a specifically sexual autonomy, often seems to want to abolish this possibility altogether. As she tells Lovelace (in a letter also offered as evidence to her mother that she has not encouraged him as her lover), "...I will not be either so undutiful, or so indiscreet, as to suffer my interests to be separated from the interests of my family, for any man on earth."<sup>1</sup> Any claim to self-motivated "interests" separate from the communal interest of her family would not only be undesirable because "undutiful," but also "indiscreet" in its underlying desire for sexual autonomy and emotional freedom. Initially, Clarissa conflates all of her "interests" with those of her family, hoping that this will allow her to escape imposed or forced unions with men like Lovelace. However, when she discovers that a "free" heart -- an uncommitted heart -- is necessarily also a heart that must be "governed by duty" and is thus subject to a forcible conjugal union with the odious Mr. Solmes, Clarissa must reassess the "interest" of her relations.<sup>2</sup> Her family, Clarissa discovers, relate to her as inflexibly as a suitor or husband might, and are "all of one mind" that she should marry Solmes despite her protests. Once again, she evades the dangers of sexual autonomy by asserting a new, conjugal relationship: suggesting herself committed to Lovelace, and thus ostensibly defined by this sexual

contract. Her pretense to any relation with Lovelace, however, marks her ruin by initiating a series of brief encounters that ultimately lead to her abduction and rape. While central, however, they are not the only relationships Clarissa maintains throughout the novel. She also defines herself -- at times, rather exclusively -- by her relationship with Anna Howe: a correspondence without the conditions imposed by her relations or lovers. Her relationship with Anna positively affirms her exceptional situation and preserves a markedly consistent sense of self alongside the fluctuating, strategic personae she is forced to deploy in order to negotiate other, more precarious relations. Yet *Clarissa* is, I will argue, is ultimately a novel about these other, less positive relationships: she is an exceptional woman who is made so through multiple sentimental affiliations: through her many attachments and her ability to move and affect others proximately.

Terms like “performance” and “persona,” are both indicative of the kind of relational subjectivity I diagnose in this text, and have historically characterized the villain Lovelace and his rakish stratagems.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, I contend that Clarissa is also mutable, and thus not simply statically opposed to his libertine energies. In recovering this aspect of Clarissa’s character, I tell a different story of the novel, one that finds unexpected correspondence between a more enterprising and dynamic Clarissa and the values of libertinism that Lovelace professes: values that stress fleeting, spontaneous affinities and contingent relations over more definite and rigid unions. This association between Clarissa and Lovelace, I will show, even suggests a concordance between Richardson’s novel and the amatory fiction that he professes to depart from: particularly, a tendency for the heroine to define herself through sexual affinities and to resist being

fixed in one kind of relationship, whether familial or contractual. However, while Clarissa does ultimately turn from her consanguineal ties to (however inevitable) conjugal ones -- a move that critics like Ruth Perry associate with the “transformation of kinship” in the latter half of the eighteenth century -- it is crucial to note that she does so resistantly and ambivalently. Indeed, that Perry’s study begins in 1748 -- and thus *with* the publication date of *Clarissa* -- is no accident.<sup>4</sup> *Clarissa* is poised on the shifting threshold of novelistic “modernization,” and Richardson’s heroine clearly struggles with the question of *how* to define herself relationally in a historical moment when the political, social and sexual ties governing citizens are being continuously reshaped and reconsidered, as Perry’s study demonstrates. Yet my chapter, which maintains Clarissa’s ambivalence in negotiating these opposing allegiances of family and courtship, resists the privileging of the emerging companionate model narrated by, among others, historians of sexuality. It suggests that the eighteenth-century is grappling as much with old ties as forging new ones.

My reading of Clarissa as a protean figure, I have already suggested, is somewhat unusual because it eclipses the usual suspect: Lovelace, who Clarissa herself calls “the perfect Proteus,” as he is “so light, so vain, so various.” Lovelace has been described by critics like William Warner as fire, as “an ever-changing element” that does not “have the fixed boundaries” of the cooler, more self-enclosed heroine. He has indeed enjoyed a long reign as the novel’s most capricious and intriguing character, simultaneously dazzling and obnoxious.<sup>5</sup> Yet I follow critics like Judith Wilt and Sandra Macpherson in seeing him as profoundly limited by his obsession with Clarissa, an observation that will resonate with my critique of male-dominated libertinism in Chapter Four’s discussion of

*La Philosophie dans le boudoir*. While Lovelace, like Clarissa, is also made exceptional and able through his relations to others -- the institutions of libertinism and prostitution that support and enable his exploitation of women -- he is often represented as powerless when faced with Clarissa on his own.<sup>6</sup> Further, and perhaps more significantly, Lovelace, who is driven by the lone desire to rape and to possess, recognizes that the protracted pursuit of Clarissa makes him, in fact, unwillingly *constant*, a rake's death-sentence: "so universal a lover" being "confined so long to one object."<sup>7</sup> The result of this seclusion is that Lovelace becomes "a more and more isolated figure" after the rape, when the "rigid canalization of correspondences" surrounding the flurry of her captivity and his many attempts at seduction are ultimately "broken down by a flood letters surrounding [her] with admiring and anxious attention," as Watt has observed.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Clarissa is repeatedly defined by her "powers of moving" and the transformative force that allows her to *affect* others and to understand and define herself through a series of proximities and affinities, as I will show.<sup>9</sup> What particularizes Clarissa in this novel is not, as has been argued, her strident and static individualism, but the way in which she is rendered exceptional by her relationships with others: whom she moves, or "touches," and by what means.<sup>10</sup> This kind of exemplarity is simply not possible in the more strictly oppositional model of sexual autonomy, where Clarissa would be only defined, objectively and thus restrictively, by who is able to touch or move *her*.

My chapter proposes a reconsideration of what makes Clarissa exemplary by looking beyond her presumed autonomy, as is usually claimed. Watt's *Rise of the Novel* exemplifies the still-pervasive tendency to read Clarissa as the consummate individual, and thus as paradigmatic of the novel as the privileged form of a newly-emergent modern

subjectivity. Watt aims to situate *Clarissa* within a trajectory that includes texts like Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), citing both as examples of a new bourgeois individualism characterized by familial independence, contractual (as opposed to "unwritten, traditional and collective") relationships, and -- particularly in *Crusoe's* case, but also in *Clarissa's* -- a marked lack of sentimentalism.<sup>11</sup> Watt says of *Clarissa*:

...she is the heroic representative of all that is free and positive in the new individualism, and especially of the spiritual independence which was associated with Puritanism: as such she has to combat all the forces that were opposed to the realisation of the new concept—the aristocracy, the patriarchal family system, and even the economic individualism whose development was so closely connected with that of Puritanism.<sup>12</sup>

Watt tries to fit *Clarissa* within a strictly oppositional paradigm: she becomes the modern individual staving off the cloying and powerful institutions that would sap her autonomy, and indeed, this model serves Watt well when relegated to moments when *Clarissa* must contend with broader networks of power like "the patriarchal family system." But I argue instead that *Clarissa* does not always define herself in opposition to her family, but often through and with them. Watt's individualist paradigm begins to show signs of strain when confronted by the more complex intimacies of the novel of sensibility, exemplified by both *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa*. In these novels -- as Watt himself must concede -- "love" is transformed from a concrete mechanism of exchange between otherwise discrete individuals, as in Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722), for example, into an

unquestionably messier and considerably more crowded sexual/social dialectic. Watt describes *Pamela* as “a struggle, not only between individuals, but between two opposed conceptions of sex and marriage held by two different social classes, and between two conceptions of the masculine and feminine roles which *make their interplay in courtship even more complex and problematic than it had previously been.*”<sup>13</sup> While Watt is able to maintain his paradigm of individualism by representing this series of relations as diametric oppositions, even he must admit that such relations are made considerably more ambiguous and complex in novels like *Clarissa*. Moving beyond a more oppositional reading of *Clarissa*, I contend that *Clarissa*’s emotional and sexual affinities both serve to confirm her individualism but do so *without* asserting her autonomy.

The epistolary register is vital in developing *Clarissa*’s sense of self as primarily relational. Letter-writing allows *Clarissa* to maintain -- indeed, to demand -- intimate affective relationships without being physically proximate to brutish siblings or violent rakes. An important premise of this chapter is the suggestive parallel Richardson’s fiction draws between the spontaneous, corporeal expressions that *Clarissa* invokes in her readers and her concurrent claims to the authenticity and, indeed, evidentiary value of the letter. Critics have productively troubled this analogy by postulating that somatic expressions *are*, in an important sense, also intellectual and psychological ones.<sup>14</sup> Julie Park, for example, has recently probed the connection between sensibility and fetishism to demonstrate the extent to which psychological responses are “configured in terms of body parts”: in the case of *Clarissa*, the sexed organs of heart and hymen.<sup>15</sup> This overlap of feeling, sentient body and intellectual, textual body, often proves crucial in connecting *Clarissa* physically and emotionally to characters from whom she remains physically

separate.<sup>16</sup> Letters also “witness,” or authenticate through a claim to presence, Clarissa’s emotional, psychological, and physical trials at the hands of her siblings and Lovelace. Clarissa thus relies upon the presence of the letter as a way to forge intense and inviolable connections between herself and others. To use the terms of this dissertation, letters allow Clarissa to gain access to Lovelace and her family *relationally*, through the sentimental mediation of her crafted, written persona.

This chapter thus recasts the oppositional relationship of Clarissa *against* her communities (of family, of sexual libertines) and will instead consider her as *within* these communities, as circulating between her family and her captors, absorbing their characteristics and mechanisms, and as defining herself in relation to them. Though undoubtedly compliant, I will argue, Clarissa is still actively resistant, a claim buttressed by recent feminist histories of the domestic novel. For example, Helen Thompson has recognized the insufficiency of our concept of the “abstract individual” to account for a specifically eighteenth-century materialist body defined by its practice -- its methods of *doing*, its political aptitudes, and, crucially, its *relations* -- rather than its sex. Thompson’s model allows for a kind of gendered resistance that is not decisive, active, or bold, but that happens through traditional relationship paradigms: specifically, through feminine acts of complicity and of subjection.<sup>17</sup> In her first letter to Anna Howe, Clarissa quotes Miss Biddulph’s ode to the “Ungen’rous sex”: “YOU talk of coquetry!—Your own false hearts / *Compel* our sex to act dissembling parts.”<sup>18</sup> As Miss Biddulph laments and Clarissa concurs, the “dissembling parts” women are forced to “act” are necessitated under compulsion, and thus not chosen “freely,” yet Thompson’s framing of this problem usefully acknowledges the fuller political possibilities in such acts of impassioned,



sentimentalized compliance: these are acts that confirm, but also expose, weaken, and evade, the strongholds of libertinism and paternalism in the novel. What Clarissa ultimately demonstrates are the ways in which such purportedly cohesive institutions are, in reality, fractured.

One of the ways she does this is through her writing and her adherence to “particularity” as expressive of empirical “Truth.” Such an emphasis on the partiality and power of truth-claims, I argue, anticipates later posthumanist and feminist scholarship on the gendered nature of objectivity. Donna Haraway contends that “[f]eminist objectivity” is only possible from a “limited location” and a “situated knowledge,” what she later calls “partial perspective.” For Haraway -- and, I will claim, for Clarissa -- the many splintered truths supplied by a partial perspective testify to the “radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims,” and thus for the vacuity and arbitrariness of any one cohesive or synthesizing claim to Truth.<sup>19</sup> For Clarissa, the part irreparably fractures even as it supports: it both confirms and cracks the whole, and it is always considered in *relation* to other parts. As Terry Eagleton has observed of Richardson’s *oeuvre* more broadly, “[t]he whole of this dangerous labile writing is merely one enormous spare part, permanently capable of being recycled into something else” -- in other words, it is cohesive but polymorphous. His novels are not uniform, but made up of contingent relations between one and many.<sup>20</sup>

In what follows, I will begin by looking at *Clarissa*’s defining moment -- the rape, a forced sexual relationship -- first in a discursive context exemplified by the readings of Warner, and then in the context of Clarissa’s own sense of autonomy and community. I begin by documenting how the criticism persists in seeing Clarissa as both autonomous

and as oppositional to Lovelace. This characterization of her has so shaped and defined our sense of Richardson's contribution to the eighteenth century's "modernizing moment," but it is precisely this sense of isolated, resistant subjectivity that, I argue, the novel elides at every turn. Revisiting the provocative textual analysis performed by William Warner in the late 1970s, I reassess some of its conclusions in light of more recent feminist work on the novel, arguing that the Clarissa Warner paints helps to illuminate -- perhaps unexpectedly -- the resemblances between Richardson's "faultless" heroine and libertine sensibilities, embodied both in Lovelace and in the more lascivious women of amatory fiction.

### **Critical Clarissas and the Limits of Lovelace**

Does Clarissa Harlowe shape her story, or does she suffer it?

This question -- or variations on it -- has dominated the criticism on Richardson's masterpiece for several decades; at least since 1979, when Warner first sent in his "minesweepers" and became "suspicious of everything" in a text that he felt threatened to seduce him at every turn.<sup>21</sup> Read straightforwardly, Richardson's infamous novel details the seduction, abduction, rape, and death of the eponymous heroine by a vile libertine. Clarissa's letters are considered more or less faithful representations of the events leading up to and following her rape. The letters act as witnesses, each a fragmentary part of a cohesive and comprehensive *whole*: Clarissa's *whole* self, accessible in her *whole* narrative. They detail Clarissa's helplessness, attest her faultless virtue, and at times even bear the physical marks of her violation: Lovelace's famous phallic fingers, hijacking and puncturing her words, reminding us that the presumably unified and pure body,

represented by her many letters, has been penetrated.<sup>22</sup> But, since its publication, some readers have seen Clarissa in a less favorable light, and these more suspicious readings have tended to emphasize her complicity in her own seduction. According to Warner -- perhaps one of the more controversial examples of readings that privilege her discursivity and agency over her otherwise almost hermetic self-representations -- *The History of a Young Lady* is Clarissa's "Story," a loaded term suggestive of authorial control and, even, manipulation. In Warner's account, Clarissa shapes her "History" into a "Story" by exploiting precisely the reader's belief that each letter can, in fact, witness in an unmediated and authentic way. Her triumph is the carefully and purposefully assembled collection of letters, testifying her virtue and culminating in her martyred death: a meaningful discursive absence. She is, at every turn, the novel's subtle but stringent form, directing and limiting Lovelace's raw, dynamic energy. She is protagonist, author, ruthless editor. Written and read, she ultimately destroys the protean Lovelace by subsuming him, perversely along with herself, into her "Story's" driving theme of moral "Truth."

The stakes of such a question are obviously high: if Clarissa actively authors, controls, and shapes her narrative, can she also be Richardson's ingenuous "Angel," the paragon of persecuted virtue? Or, if she can be suspected of discursive play and duplicity, does this necessarily also compromise her moral and sexual integrity? Though Richardson famously wrote her to be a spotless, even transcendent, heroine -- and generations of ardent readers found her so -- since penning the *History*, the author and his progeny, an "interpretative alliance" of "humanist" critics, have had to defend her against readers who find her rigid or smug, who see her death as over-the-top or pointless, or

who want her to marry, not reject, her perpetrator.<sup>23</sup> This “alliance,” according to Warner, “is so powerful that it has obscured its own operation,” in essence effacing and naturalizing its own pervasive critical apparatus, and thus “ma[king] it difficult to think the possibility of a radically different way of knowing *Clarissa*.”<sup>24</sup> Thus we read *Clarissa* alongside and through this interpretative agenda, easily and often without question. Yet poised, as the novel is, between *Pamela* (1740), Richardson’s spectacularly popular -- and notoriously suspect -- tale of “Virtue Rewarded,” and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753), his steady and bland moral opus, *Clarissa* begs consideration as a threshold in Richardson’s *oeuvre*, not simply as embodying a tenuously modernizing moment, as critics like Perry have suggested, but also as a moment in which the author is struggling against the limitations of his own pedagogical project.<sup>25</sup> While Richardson is openly trying to correct the problems of feminine virtue made conspicuous in his earlier work, *Clarissa* is hardly an uncomplicated or straightforward account of feminine virtue.

Virtually every critic who has ever written about *Clarissa* has engaged the question of her culpability, even if in passing.<sup>26</sup> Terry Eagleton mounts a spirited defense of her as the unfortunate, unwitting *locus* of Richardson’s uneasy reconciliation of bourgeois and aristocratic ideological self-interest. He sees that she must deploy “countervailing tactics...if she is to survive at all,” but laments that “she is thus drawn onto the terrain of a conflict in which she will always be a loser because the rules disadvantage her from the outset.”<sup>27</sup> As recently as last year, Park has indicted Richardson and Lovelace as co-conspirators in the rape of *Clarissa*, as Richardson “depict[s] and collaborat[es] with Lovelace’s male subjectivity in order to help represent *Clarissa*’s subjectivity” in such a way as to focus and even enjoy Lovelace’s constant

pursuit of her “fetishized body part.”<sup>28</sup> For Eagleton, Park, and indeed countless other critics, Clarissa seems the unfortunate and often relatively helpless victim of (albeit extraordinary) circumstance: any active role she might play in shaping or instigating the course of the narrative is often minimized or completely effaced. For example, Park’s formulation, which reads Clarissa’s subjectivity as always-already filtered through the particularized context of masculine fetish, still promisingly suggests by its logic Lovelace’s dependence upon Clarissa’s pen for his perverse pleasures, and thus her (heavily problematized but still viable) phallic power. Yet even Park’s eventual concession that Clarissa “may be seen” as “the most powerful” kind of woman -- “one who can take a man’s pen and write her own words as if they were his own” -- rings insincere in a text that opens by painting Clarissa as the consummate *ingénue* and that continues throughout to elide Clarissa’s contributions in favor of those made by Lovelace.<sup>29</sup>

In such accounts, then, Lovelace is seen as the novel’s perpetual -- if awful and depraved -- agent, and Clarissa as perpetually *subject*: to his whims, to his stratagems, and to his lascivious portraits of her. And perhaps no critic has stood more accused of valorizing Lovelace’s cruelty and of vituperating Clarissa’s virtue than Warner, whose book *Reading Clarissa: The Struggles of Interpretation* has been described by Eagleton as “an ominous exposé of the truly reactionary nature of much deconstructionist ‘radicalism,’ once divorced from the social and political contexts it so characteristically finds hard to handle,” precisely because the text so unapologetically “sings the virtues of [Clarissa’s] rapist.”<sup>30</sup> A deconstructionist reading of rape as *only* discursive insidiously undercuts the force of the physical act, as readers can and do understand the concrete

reality of rape for women, both in the eighteenth century and in the present day.<sup>31</sup> Warner's defense is that he explicitly resists being seduced by the text and refuses to "play[...] a supportive role in an interpretative alliance directed by the text [he's] intended to master."<sup>32</sup> In culling the image of the critic as "master," and the text as a threatening, "direct[ing]" seductress, Warner fantasizes the act of criticism as a Lovelacian courtship; from such a posture, the discussion of rape becomes inexcusably tactless, at times even crass, as Terry Castle has observed.<sup>33</sup> And Warner, who unfeelingly describes Clarissa's rape as "the most cogent response" a rake can perform to Clarissa's precious "fictional projection of her self," indeed should seem inhospitable to readings of the heroine that cheer her as proto-feminist.<sup>34</sup> In this section, however, I recover from Warner's account a discursive and composite Clarissa: a protagonist whose more relational and contingent aspects mirror Lovelace's own, and thus dismantle the opposition that Warner is so eager to (de)construct.

For Warner, Clarissa is in many ways a narrative double-agent: she is the shrewdly manipulative author and editor of her "Story," but also its bewitchingly sentimental subject. Thus, Clarissa's most "effective feint" in her ideological and narrative battle to evade Lovelace is the "idea" she devises of a "whole story," which ultimately "grows into the idea of the 'whole book'" about Clarissa, *by Clarissa*.<sup>35</sup> In other words, by claiming herself to be a neutral transcriber of events, merely an unmediated recorder of "the whole story," Clarissa hides the puppet strings of her master-narration, *Pamela*-like, and naturalizes her role as partial author. Warner's assertion that Clarissa stealthily "wraps herself in the mantle of her own integrity" leads him to a series of ruminations on her methods of artifice:

...has she remained uncompromised by these struggles? or, is she hiding something unsavory beneath her garments? Can she be single (a whole purified body which *means* one thing) *while* she constructs that meaning? Can she engage in manipulation, assembling and composing while she is one single thing? The mimetic program she devises for her narrative is an attempt to hide her weaving fingers. The construction of a self is carried on so as to conceal the fact of construction: she *is* an assemblage and repetition of all her world's values....All this allows her art to take on the aspect of nature, allows its feverish activity of becoming to take on the character of being...<sup>36</sup>

I find this moment in Warner's text provocative, as its sexually-charged, oppositional language of process and of product, of movement and of stasis, reveals an insightful claim: that Clarissa's nature is in its hidden aspect of "*becoming*," not in its outward semblance of "being." The active, behind-the-scenes language of Clarissa's "assembling," "composing," and "weaving," suggests the surreptitious agency given by her methods of artifice, and further, her state of constant flux, while the contrast of blatant repetition, "single"-ness, and exemplarity betrays the error of seeing her as a fixed, "whole purified body which *means* one thing." What Warner deems the artificial Clarissa is a much more dynamic and polymorphous "being" than her "whole" and "single" "construction of a self," which is quite easily deflated and almost laughably transparent.<sup>37</sup> Warner's Clarissa, here, is refreshingly active, tirelessly self-generating,

and a changeable, evasive presence in a text that constantly tries to fix her into its paragon.

But Warner -- perhaps to his detriment -- is wedded to the metaphor of “struggle” and, by extension, of opposition, and thus needs to account for how Lovelace, the professed “master of Metamorphoses,” challenges and overcomes Clarissa’s own “elaborate pieces of artifice,” her “inventions designed for warfare.”<sup>38</sup> However, where this leads Warner is quite exciting. His conclusion is that Clarissa deploys all of these polymorphous, perverse strategies of invention and artifice to perpetrate a fraud of *unity*: to fasten “the reader or interpreter” (or the Lovelace) “in a kind of prison-house of reality, living under a fixed hierarchy of values, and tethered to a concomitant set of moral imperatives.”<sup>39</sup> Warner’s Clarissa, here, is reminiscent of amatory heroines like Eliza Haywood’s Fantomina, who employ similar strategies of reinvention and performance to enforce moral obligations on duplicitous or insincere men. Clarissa, in meeting Lovelace’s strategies with her own rather than becoming his static victim, harnesses a libertine approach to defuse libertine advances.

What Warner then misses, in his criminalizing of Clarissa, is that she deploys her own series of duplicitous amatory strategies but to different ends than does Lovelace: in order to preserve her virtue. The prior characterization of Clarissa as sly assemblage-in-process is overshadowed by a new Clarissa-*vis*-Lovelace, who must supply the “regulating categories” that Lovelace will loosen through comedy, parody, and puppetry, “winning our laughter and giving us pleasure.”<sup>40</sup> This characterization of Clarissa becomes increasingly unwieldy as Warner works through the metaphor of struggle. Clarissa, after her rape, now “tries to assume a Godlike authority and dominion over” her



friends and adversaries, “making herself into the center and subject that reigns over a multiplicity of objects.” Indeed, Warner presses on, the black hole of Clarissa’s narrative power becomes all-consuming: “[o]nce they are placed within the confines of [her] book, all that Lovelace, James, Bella, and the rest can think or do simply predicates their subject, Clarissa.”<sup>41</sup> In this respect, Warner’s reading is, in the end, surprisingly complicit with the fawning, titillated “interpretative alliance” he purports to resist. Like those other readers, Warner installs Clarissa as a potent moral and discursive authority, the final word in a text where she is imprisoned, kidnapped, drugged, raped, jailed again and then killed by a “death that serves her,” he says, “in so many ways.”<sup>42</sup>

While there is quite obviously much lacking in the approach of Warner’s study (how *does* it serve someone to be dead?), what his reading reveals is that Clarissa is rather remarkably libertine-like: she is simultaneously responsive (to Lovelace’s stratagems) and yet resolutely determined to achieve her own ends. This dialectical Clarissa is evident in both the text itself and in critical accounts like Warner’s, but is ultimately absent from their explicit political, pedagogical, and moral agenda, which seeks to posit only one version of Clarissa. Richardson describes Clarissa as “an exemplar to her sex” in the Preface and clearly writes her with this end in mind, but laments that she and her motives are often misunderstood.<sup>43</sup> Warner indicts her as manipulative and controlling but then juxtaposes a one-dimensional rigid and frigid Clarissa against the warm and mutable Lovelace, represented by fire: “an ever-changing element” that does not “have the fixed boundaries of an object,” an “unstable surface which makes what it meets unstable.”<sup>44</sup> For Warner, it is most particularly the transmutable and communicable qualities of fire that so characterize Lovelace, “who,” he

argues rather charitably, “gives us the novel’s most convincing versions of human attachment,” as his “feeling[s]...seem [...] more genuine for being largely concealed.”<sup>45</sup> Because this version of Lovelace is reciprocally affected -- he affects others, and then refracts his own affective response -- Warner seems to claim him as the most relational and contingent character in the text:

...Lovelace’s life is a function of Clarissa as antagonist in struggle, and of Belford as recipient of his narratives. Each gives him the possibility of playing, performing, and feeling alive. That he is a function of the manifold of struggle and the interplay between self and other means that he is an uncertain and changing quantity, but also that he acknowledges, with every story and gesture, that he needs the other person and will feel the most acute sense of loss on their departure.<sup>46</sup>

The same term “interplay,” however, is used only a few pages prior to characterize not only Lovelace, but, more specifically the relationship between Lovelace and Clarissa. In this earlier formulation, Lovelace is given much more agency: he “empties the self,” and “makes it [into] a surface, a mask, a series of folds,” and, in so doing, actively “reduce[s]” Clarissa in much the same way, “to a surface...arrayed into a series of folds.” “[T]ogether,” Warner continues, Lovelace and Clarissa “constitute a manifold of struggle,” co-equally dynamic and complex, so that the “existence of each” is “a function of” this “interplay.”<sup>47</sup> Here Warner briefly sketches a Clarissa who is not Lovelace’s archetypal adversary, nor the novel’s synthesizing *telos*, but in fact a radically contingent

and complex being -- albeit, problematically, she is *made so* by his “reduc[tion],” as he will later be a “function” of her “antagonis[m]” -- whose multiple “folds” are simultaneously surface and strata. This Clarissa echoes the “assembling” and “composing,” *in-process* Clarissa already briefly encountered in Warner’s text, whose agency is barely perceptible but always there. And, as the term “interplay” is associated just a few pages hence with Lovelace’s “possibility of playing, performing, and feeling alive,” it follows logically that Clarissa must also -- in Warner’s view, to a limited extent -- participate in this kind of play and performance as a “function” of the “manifold of struggle” and of the “interplay” between herself and Lovelace. It is this dialectical Clarissa that I want to recover from the pages of Richardson’s text because it underscores her affinity with the libertine values espoused not only by Lovelace, but also by less “virtuous” amatory heroines.

Where Warner limits Clarissa in her efforts at self-representation and display -- claiming that these only reinforce her “singularly convincing image of herself as virtue” -- Lovelace himself supplies us with an instructive counterpoint.<sup>48</sup> He writes to Belford:

...this lady is a mistress of our passions: no one ever had to so much perfection the art of moving. This all her family know, and have equally feared and revered her for it. This I know too; and doubt not more and more to experience. How charmingly must this divine creature warble forth (if a proper occasion be given) her melodious elegiacs! Infinite beauties are there in a weeping eye.<sup>49</sup>

Here Lovelace -- the consummate libertine, thrilled by the aggregation of pleasures, the “more and more” of Clarissa’s wretched “experience” -- is awed by her “art of moving,” the “infinite beauties” collected in her one “weeping eye.” Indeed, it is *Lovelace*, and not *Clarissa*, who seeks to control these “infinite beauties” by collapsing and perverting them into the same “experience”: his fantasized seduction. And it is Clarissa, Lovelace acknowledges here, who is “infinite[ly]” various in her strategies of self-representation, who pleurably “warble[s] forth” her melancholy when given the “occasion.” He, on the other hand, is locked into a pattern of compulsively *occasioning* her “melodious elegiacs.” Her capacity for touching and moving others is expansive; this is why both Clarissa’s family and Lovelace “know,” and her family “fear[s]” and “revere[s],” her “art of moving.” His is reductive: he can only touch and move her in this one way, suggesting the ways in which Clarissa’s polymorphous strategies defuse his limited, pointed advances. She threatens to neutralize and sentimentalize his advances through her dazzling and myriad displays of feeling. Indeed, Warner is correct in recognizing the awesome power of self-representation that Clarissa possesses, but he mistakenly sees that power as one-dimensional, and, thus, as merely oppositional to Lovelace’s considerably more exciting masquerade of representations. Lovelace, in describing himself as a servant to the “mistress of [his] passions,” suggests that Clarissa’s “art of moving” is much more prolific and pressing than his repetitive libertine incitements, especially in their ability to awe him into constancy.<sup>50</sup>

This, it would seem, is the fatal error of Warner’s Clarissa and indeed, most other critical Clarissas: he substitutes his earlier characterization of a more mutable -- and thus, in Warner’s terms, more Lovelacian -- Clarissa for a later Clarissa who is pure antagonist,

only conceivable in opposition to her counterpart. And it is this critical oversight that leads Warner into, arguably, his most controversial and troubling claim:

...rape is the most cogent response to Clarissa's fictional projection of her self as a whole unified body 'full of light.' [Lovelace] can subvert this fiction by introducing a small part of himself *into* Clarissa. Thus the rape, like all Lovelace's displacements, will seek to induce the slight difference that will make all the difference.<sup>51</sup>

For a moment setting aside some of the disturbing language here (rape as a "slight difference," as a "cogent response"), Warner argues that Lovelace can only conquer the powerful "fiction" of Clarissa as a "whole unified body" by introducing his "part" into that fiction, and so the physical introduction of his "part" into her body is reconceived as a discursive act: Lovelace "displaces," a favorite term for both deconstructionist and Freudian critics, by writing his "part" into her "Story." Warner draws this as an instance of the part *conquering* the whole by, paradoxically, exposing its compositeness. In other words, Lovelace's counter to the totalizing "fiction" of Clarissa's "whole unified body" is to expose it: to penetrate it and contaminate it with parts not of that body, parts that show its construction, its assemblage. The rape, Warner urges, is how Lovelace is able to reveal Clarissa's hidden, weaving fingers.

However, Warner's claim is problematized by both Lovelace's expressions of impotence upon the completion of the rape and by Clarissa's forceful attempts to confront her rapist and to reconnect with her family following the act, both of which

suggest that the rape has, in fact, strengthened Clarissa's desire for connection rather than "exposing" such connections as false or arbitrary. Further, it is Lovelace, and not Clarissa, who is limited by the rape -- it *fixes* him to her while liberating her from the confusion of his advances. Lovelace begins his fateful letter to Belford by saying, "AND now, Belford, I can go no further."<sup>52</sup> His "part" is now complete. He has done all that is possible as a predator and has reached the limits of libertinism; all that remains is for him to do is to abandon Clarissa and to pursue another victim, which he finds himself unable to do because he has become sentimentally attached to her. Clarissa, in contrast, abandons any possibility of a real sentimental connection, and indicts him by proliferating his shame, replicating the act in a series of scribbled notes, all of which strive to regain proximity to her loved ones by redeveloping sentimental connections. She is "free" -- and I, of course, use this term in a limited sense -- to pursue other, more emotionally-gratifying and self-actualizing connections. The scraps of paper Dorcas collects from Clarissa's room immediately after the event show, piecemeal, her making sense of the assault through vocal performances, exploding like a hydra all over the text: she inhabits, by turns, the indignant voice of a sexual martyr, the desperate voice of a victim, the forcibly distant voice of allegory and parable, the thundering voice of a disgruntled patriarch, the smug voices of imperious siblings, etc. etc. Lovelace himself is so moved by these "scraps" that he finds he cannot copy any more "eloquent nonsense" after the very first letter -- tellingly, the letter in which Clarissa laments the finality of the event to Anna Howe by saying "...I am no longer what I was in any one thing," suggesting that every aspect of Clarissa has been shifted and displaced by Lovelace's act of cruelty.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, here, Clarissa directly refers to herself as a collective of "things" that

Lovelace has comprehensively displaced, challenging Warner's claim that she was previously unified and is now fragmented by the act of rape.

Her letter to her father begins similarly by moving from a lament of isolation to a fervent prayer for connection. She asks, "will nobody plead for your poor suffering girl?" -- but then moves to her telling him, "Yes, I *will* call you papa, and help yourself as you can—for you are my own dear papa, whether you will or not—And though I am an unworthy child—yet I *am* your child."<sup>54</sup> Thus she emphasizes their connection even as she acknowledges that Lovelace, in the fulfillment of her father's curse, has given the family an actual basis upon which to shame and reject her. Similarly, her letter to her sister Bella aims to stress a lost connection, assigning Bella a sense of emotional perception and acuity that surpasses Clarissa's own: "You penetrated my proud heart with...jealousy," "[y]ou knew me better than I knew myself." In so doing she reestablishes Bella as the knowing and more experienced older sister, reframing herself within the traditional family structure as the reckless and naïve younger child: "I was too secure in the knowledge I thought I had of my own heart..."<sup>55</sup> In this moment, then, Clarissa is anxious to reclaim a sense of herself within the family structures she has abandoned, despite their rigidity. She also supplicates with Miss Howe in a number of the letters, begging her: "if thou has friendship, help me / And speak the words of peace to my divided soul, / That wars within me... I'm tott'ring on the brink / Of peace; and thou art all the hold I've left!"<sup>56</sup> Anna Howe thus remains, consistently, the sure and supportive mooring for Clarissa's wavering sense of herself, yet one she only turns to after she has invoked less-certain and more volatile relationships with father, mother, and sister.

I understand this ability to turn an infinite variety of lenses on the event as the only way now available for Clarissa to respond to Lovelace's insupportable behavior because it allows Clarissa to escape the reality of her rape by reframing herself within an alternate network of friends and family. By fracturing the event into so many different perspectives, Clarissa can refract and resist the one totalizing lens of Lovelace's desire and indict him for his compulsions at the same time by calling upon others to witness what he has done. Formal peculiarities in this scene support my assertion: as Park has also recognized, the novel doubly registers Clarissa's rape through a fragmentation of both Clarissa's *and*, importantly Lovelace's, correspondence. While many critics have focused attention on Clarissa's incoherent scraps of paper and how they help to record the trauma of her rape, few have seen Lovelace's own guiltily scribbled acknowledgement as evidence of anything but his extreme indifference to the event.<sup>57</sup> But, the novel tells us again and again, this is not an event that Lovelace can remain indifferent to, and so his meaningful brevity, here, must register something more than simply his cruelty. Park suggests that it confirms his impotence by offering "the most telling proof of Clarissa's corporeal inviolability;" I am not as confident that the physical rape is so insubstantial, but would agree that this rhetorical choice by Richardson does evince how empty and powerless the seeming triumph of Clarissa's rape actually is, and -- in my own formulation -- how insignificant Lovelace's discursive "part" becomes.<sup>58</sup> It is merely one among many, drowned in the sea of papers from Clarissa that flood the text by asserting the relationships she can still draw upon even in her moment of trial, immediately following Lovelace's statement. For Lovelace, indeed, the game is up: he



has crippled himself by forcing a relation where Clarissa has repeatedly refused it, losing all of the pleasures he had previously enjoyed.

The next section will, then, continue by looking at Clarissa's parts and the ways in which she defines herself relationally to others. I consider Clarissa's narrative particulars as a way of maintaining immediacy, presence, and mobility within the impossibly stagnant patriarchal expectations of the text, arguing that such strategies echo those exhibited by heroines like Haywood's Fantomina.

### **Playing the Part: Clarissa's Relations**

As a libertine, Lovelace knows and wants *only* what is immediate, pressing, and urgent: the object of his desire, ever elusive and ever varying. Clarissa, by contrast, is usually read as transcending this scrutinizing and suffocating drive: she is believed to transform the particular moment into the universal and the eternal, becoming, as Angus Ross notes, increasingly "Christ-like" as the novel progresses.<sup>59</sup> It is precisely this "transcendent" Clarissa that Richardson felt should be a model for his faithful readers, even as some found her blind adherence to virtue positively sadistic.<sup>60</sup> Without casting aspersions on Clarissa's attempts at martyrdom -- acts I find myself equal parts inspiring and exasperating -- I instead privilege, in what follows, the moments in the text where Clarissa seems to recognize and harness the more "Lovelacian" power of immediacy, or what Warner calls "the extraordinary quality of [the] particular moment."<sup>61</sup> Indeed, Clarissa's ability to harness this "extraordinary quality" of "particular[s]," I will argue, is the most salient way in which she manages and negotiates erotic relations with others, and further, in so doing, aligns herself unexpectedly with the libertine project of

spontaneous and fleeting affinities. By examining the ways in which Clarissa seeks to strengthen or intensify her sense of her virtue -- and further, to *represent* her virtue to others -- I demonstrate how she assembles a composite and indeed “exemplary” sense of self through her “particular” and local relations with others.

An instructive comparison can be found in Eliza Haywood’s *Fantomina; or Love in a Maze* (1724), a text in which the heroine is also quite obviously limited and socially bound, and in which she suffers greatly at the hands of her lover, but crucially also, in which she enjoys and is allowed by critics a level measure of erotic play in her polymorphous masquerade.<sup>62</sup> It is a particularly rich depiction of the female body as seemingly unified but in fact explosively various, as the heroine constantly reinvents herself, through disguise and artifice, to attract and keep her inconstant lover Beauplaisir. Helen Thompson, one of Haywood’s most incisive readers, recognizes that this is not a simple game of substitution: rather, “Haywood produces a series of whole bodies from what would seem the scant resources of one body.” This emphatically material, physical replication happens, in the text, on a separate “epistemological register” from the intradiegetic narration of Beauplaisir’s letters, which supply a counterpoint to the “perpetual present of Beauplaisir’s desire.”<sup>63</sup> The letters, then, confirm Beauplaisir in his stratagems and also confirm, in their shared reader, the heroine as one body, when she receives two letters intended for two separate lovers.

In *Fantomina*, letters serve as a “register,” recording and indicting Beauplaisir by separating him from the “present” of his desire. Not so, I contend, in *Clarissa*. Indeed, the immediacy and presence *Fantomina* achieves through physical disguise and masquerade, I argue, is precisely what *Clarissa* attempts to convey in her writing:

resisting the violation of her physical body by substituting “a series of whole bodies,” letters that lay claim to authentic specimens of self and thus to provide an expansive aesthetic context for any one act. With the epistolary providing the primary “epistemological register” in the novel, Clarissa invokes in a blatantly contradictory way the assumption that self-representations are singular and exemplary, and thus not serial. And nowhere is this attempt at rendering herself fully present more evident than in her resurrection in the novel’s final series of letters, in which she returns to the text as many Clarissas still performing the roles demanded by her friends and family. She prostrates herself “into” the “awful presence” of her father “by these lines,” supplicating “on her knees” throughout her “repeated prayer” to him for forgiveness. She “salutes” the “hands” of her mother, comforting her that “the principal end of [her] pious care” has been achieved. She condescends to her brother James, chastising him for his “passion” and his “rigorous heart,” “deaf” to her suffering, telling him that “NOW is that time, and THIS the occasion” for her pardon. She fantasizes Arabella weeping “unrestrained” over her grave. She meditates, contemplatively, on the “ways of Providence” with her uncles.<sup>64</sup> And she will wind herself through and among the letters of Lovelace as the text ends, serving as a counterpoint, a final moment of fracturing, as a prominent editorial note following her death apprises the reader. Each letter presents the reader with a different Clarissa: one adapted to the particular relation that she has developed with the addressee. Her father, for example, will be moved by a supplicating and compliant daughter; James, on the other hand, can only be rebuked if confronted. By adapting herself strategically to each relation, and converting them through her particularized self-representation, Clarissa unifies them in the more collective act of mourning her death and

-- importantly -- of confirming her as exemplary. The rapturous heights of their grief at the novel's end only serves to testify to Clarissa's singular virtue: a virtue she has convinced them of, paradoxically, through an artful and tailored series of stylized self-representations.

That Clarissa is aware of herself as consciously constructing self-representations in relation to others becomes rather immediately evident in the text. In the first paragraph of her first letter to Anna Howe, she writes:

How you oppress me, my dearest friend, with your politeness! I cannot doubt your sincerity; but you should take care that you give me not reason from your kind partiality to call in question your judgment. You do not distinguish that I take many admirable hints from you, and have the art to pass them upon you for my own. For in all you do, in all you say, nay, in your very looks (so animated!) you give lessons, to one who loves you and observes you as I love and observe you, without knowing that you do. So, pray, my dear, be more sparing of your praise for the future, lest after this confession we should suspect that you secretly intend to praise yourself, while you would be thought only to commend another.<sup>65</sup>

This opening self-representation is strange in its combination of outward "politeness" and affection with self-interest. Describing Anna's affection as curiously "oppress[ive]," Clarissa seems to suggest that even consensual friendships can be governing and can affect behavior. Clarissa's own self-stylings are then viewed as "art[ful]" in that they

absorb and imitate Anna's own behaviors while passing them off as Clarissa's own. From the outset, then, some of Clarissa's most defining and "admirable" behaviors -- behaviors that Anna has described in the previous letter as "excelling [in] all your sex" (40) -- are found to be mutual, shared, or at the very least, explicitly borrowed. And yet Richardson does something interesting here. He does want to distinguish Clarissa in some way, and so he has Clarissa *chide* Anna for her vanity in finding those mirrored behaviors so absorbingly attractive, as they are behaviors that serve only to "praise [her]self" and thus cast her effusive adulations as perversely self-motivated. In this gentle chastisement, Clarissa does actually set herself apart, both in her penetration in recognizing the self-serving aspects of Anna's compliment and in her candor in expressing them to Anna, however delicately. In this way, Anna's relationship to Clarissa, while relational and indeed positive and supportive, serves to confirm her sense of self.

In contrast, Clarissa's family sequesters her, transforming what is a nominally "positive" exemplarity in her relationship to Anna Howe into an isolating "autonomy." Her Uncle John writes, "...I could not read your letter to myself, without being unmanned. How can you be so unmoved yourself, yet be so able to move everybody else?"<sup>66</sup> Here John describes her as constitutionally rigid, pitted against a family that she is able to dissolve at will, with John himself "unmanned" by her sentimental supplications. In another letter, Bella describes her as an unnatural mixture of qualities, and thus as pejoratively exemplary: "In your proposals and letters to your brother, you have showed yourself so silly and so wise, so young and so old, so gentle and so obstinate, so meek and so violent, that never was there so mixed a character."<sup>67</sup> These

characterizations are contradictory -- John finds her “unmoved” and Bella finds her “mixed” and active -- but both serve to mark and isolate her as exceptional, emphasizing her opposition to the family that is cohesive and of one mind: as John tells her “You must not conquer father, mother, uncles, everybody. Depend upon that.”<sup>68</sup>

While throughout the novel Clarissa undeniably operates within impossibly stringent familial, social, and physical restraints, such constraints do not necessarily eradicate playfulness, or a sense of self-pleasure, and often even seem to incite or invite an eroticized and impassioned response from her.<sup>69</sup> Clarissa in fact aligns herself with her sister Bella in a manner similar to -- but less explicit than -- that of her letter to Miss Howe. Though Clarissa promises to “do justice” to “[e]verything she said against me” in her description of the disagreement to Miss Howe, as well as to report her own “conduct,” in order for Anna to “judg[e]” properly with “approbation or disapprobation,” the letter offers a number of insights into how Clarissa absorbs and “reflects” back the behavior of others, even those behaviors she otherwise purports to loathe.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, throughout the letter Clarissa’s report betrays the overlap and conflation of her own behaviors with those of the vile Bella, but always within the overarching context of Clarissa’s claim to truth and “justice.” Though Clarissa’s letter has the intended effect of strengthening the reader’s sense of her virtue through its susceptibility to Bella’s purportedly more powerful jealousy, and thus intensifies virtue through its relation to vice, Clarissa does so through a fiction of opposition and of juxtaposition. “Indifferent people,” Clarissa sneers, “judging of us two, from what *you* say” -- and, I would underscore, from what Clarissa *reports* -- “would either think *me* a very artful creature, or *you*, a very spiteful one.”<sup>71</sup> Both Clarissa and Bella here give voice to the Haywoodian

observation that “virtue” or “vice” are socially constructed phenomena, which Diderot, and then ultimately Sade, will echo in France. As Clarissa notes, what others will “judge” or see is based solely on external factors, on outward observations, and thus fully contingent and relational.

Further, Bella is described frequently in the text as having an “*outward eye*,” a characterization which is clearly meant to suggest her superficiality, but which also more tellingly suggests her perspicuity in identifying artifice and strategy.<sup>72</sup> Bella’s “outward eye” proves shrewd in her accusation that Clarissa is “one of the artfullest I ever knew,” substantiated by an account of her own limitations as seductress:

And then followed by an accusation so low! so unsisterly! – That I next-to-bewitched people, by my insinuating address: that nobody could be valued or respected but must stand like cyphers wherever I came. How often, said she, have I and my brother been talking upon a subject, and had everybody’s attention till *you* came in, with your bewitching *meek* pride, and *humble* significance; and then we have either been stopped by references to Miss Clarissa’s opinion, forsooth; or been forced to stop ourselves, or must have talked on unattended to by everybody.<sup>73</sup>

Bella complains that she and her brother become mere “cyphers” in Clarissa’s presence -- wallpaper to the dazzling displays of “*meek* pride and *humble* significance” that Clarissa puts on. Clarissa’s “bewitching” and “insinuating” behaviors thus prove overwhelmingly attractive, “stopp[ing]” and “forc[ing]” her siblings’ lesser conversation. Grammatical

stress laid on the words “meek” and “humble” clearly betray Bella’s bitterness, and help to underscore her accusations of duplicity and “artful[ness].” But what Bella also accuses Clarissa of here is of strengthening herself relationally, by becoming a “cypher”: a word that suggests both an increase in relational value as well as Bella’s inherently lesser or zero value.<sup>74</sup> Thus Bella’s real accusation here is that Clarissa would hardly be considered exceptional if not relative: this “accusation so low!” rings authentic, as Clarissa herself laments Bella’s lack of discernment in an earlier account of her sister’s courtship with Lovelace, precisely by considering smugly how it reflects upon her.

The substance of her claims are verified by Clarissa’s own self-reflections in a subsequent letter to Anna Howe, where she writes:

Your partial love will be ready to acquit me of capital and intentional faults—but oh, my dear! my calamities have humbled me enough to make me turn my gaudy eye inward; to make me look into myself!—And what have I discovered there?—Why, my dear friend, more *secret* pride and vanity than I could have thought lain in my unexamined heart.<sup>75</sup>

In characterizing her own eye as “gaudy,” Clarissa aligns herself with the “outward eye” of Bella, reinforcing her own perception and penetration as merely ornamental and misdirected, simultaneously reinforcing the artifice and shallowness in outward self-representations. Further, she shares Bella’s vantage point until turning this eye inward, when -- properly “humbled” -- Clarissa discovers that she shares a motivation for “*secret*



pride and vanity,” which reaffirms Bella’s claim (and indeed Clarissa’s own chastisement of Anna Howe) that meekness and humility are rarely ingenuous.

A closer look at the scene with Bella suggests, similarly, that Clarissa and Bella are more closely and intimately aligned in their behavior than Clarissa’s professions of helplessness would otherwise suggest. As I mentioned above, Bella’s remarks formally adopt a tone of spitefulness when italicized, as when she is “surprised that the *witty*, the *prudent*, nay, the *dutiful* and *pi-ous* (so she sneeringly pronounced the word) Clarissa Harlowe, should be so strangely fond of a profligate man.” And yet Clarissa’s own response harnesses some of this same energy, flinging sarcasm for sarcasm: “The *aggressor* should not *complain* – And as to *oppor-tune* offers, would to heaven some-one had offered *oppor-tune-ly* to somebody. It is not my fault, Bella, the *oppor-tune* gentleman don’t come!”<sup>76</sup> Richardson’s juxtaposition of these stresses on the page affirm the conflation and overlap of the two girls’ voices, as the argument becomes increasingly heated; further, I would contend, this mimicry also demonstrates Clarissa’s ability to absorb and reflect back the behaviors of those around her. Rather than staunchly opposing herself to Bella -- remaining passive and compliant, or presenting a unified front of “meekness”-- Clarissa reflects and intensifies Bella’s hostile energy, drawing upon it in her responses to her sister.

Accordingly, Bella accuses Clarissa of being a “reflecting creature” during an especially heated exchange: “Such a *saucy meekness*; such a *best manner*; and such venom in words!—Oh Clary! Clary! Thou wert always a *two-faced* girl!” Bella will later go on to describe Clarissa as a “cunning creature” and a “mixed character” with “contradictory qualities,” all of which suggest a dynamism and a vitality that hardly

portray a unified and vapid paragon of virtue.<sup>77</sup> And Clarissa's defense, in this moment of impassioned disparagement, is scarcely exculpatory: she sneers, "Nobody thought I had two faces when I gave up all into my papa's management," which Bella rightfully recognizes as "another of [her] *fetches*," as the reader knows Clarissa and Anna Howe have repeatedly strategized about the political implications of managing the dairy-house, her grandfather's estate, and have weighed the political advantages of giving it over to her father.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, while Bella may only possess a limited, passive, and thus "outward" view, of Clarissa, what presents itself to her view -- even in the space of one short letter, narrated by Clarissa herself -- is how overlapping and indeed indistinguishable Bella's voice is from Clarissa's.

Thus, whether in an effort to defend herself or to suggest her virtue, to preserve her sense of self or to loosen it, to render herself exceptional or to humble herself, Clarissa's behavior is always mutual and reflective of the others who surround her. Indeed, she laments rather openly to Anna that such behaviors seem easily to multiply themselves: that her "more capital artifices...branch out into lesser ones without number." "Yet," she concludes, "*all* have not only the face of truth, but are real truth; although not a principal motive."<sup>79</sup> It is my contention that "*all*" these behaviors "have the face of truth" because they are so omnipresent and inherent, so pervasive in the world of the novel that there is no rising above them, no becoming truly "exemplary" in isolation from others. Further, pleasure is -- at least in part -- a motivation in these self-conscious displays of artifice and of mimesis. In recognizing Clarissa's demonstrated pleasure in her various personae, I counter the assumption that, throughout the novel, she derives pleasure only from the ingenuous observance of law and virtuous obedience,

while Lovelace sits poised as the consummate transgressor and libertine.<sup>80</sup> In her tireless evasion of boundaries through the performance of personae that imply her constant observance of them, and in the ways in which she defines herself by more fleeting relations instead of the fixity of marriage, I contend, Clarisse resembles the heroines of early eighteenth-century amatory fiction more than she does those of later domestic fiction, or as Ruth Perry refers to them, her literary “daughters,” and it is with this consideration in mind that I conclude my chapter.<sup>81</sup>

### **Conclusion: Clarissa’s Tableaux**

A final example of Clarissa’s strategic self-representations illustrates how she is able to diffuse the intensity of Lovelace’s *physical* advances by insisting on their textuality, their symbolism, and their aesthetics. Clarissa possesses an uncanny capacity to construct elaborate sentimental tableau, in which Lovelace, in so many ways the consummate Restoration rake, is all too willing to play a starring role.<sup>82</sup> The tableau is a conflation of visual and textual representation and accordingly positions the reader as conscious of seeing, watching, hearing, and feeling: it is a moment when a reader might feel as though she has *witnessed* what the text has *shown*. Tableau theory has tended to focus on theatrical or dramatic texts but the intensely visual and deeply emotive qualities of the letters in *Clarissa* similarly enable and, indeed, solicit such a multisensory experience on the part of the reader, and, in turn, in the world of the novel as testified to by Lovelace and others. Indeed, by recasting Lovelace’s attempts at seduction within sentimental tableaux that offer more fixed narratives and thus control the outcome/meaning of the

scene, Clarissa is able to forge a different kind of relationship with him and thus to evade his attempts at isolating and sexually victimizing her.

Indeed, the conscious manipulation of the tableau gives Clarissa the ability to shape and to *re-present* what Lovelace sees when he looks at her, and further, to assume some control over her own representation in a world structured by libertine language and law. Resistance, direct and open, will prove counter-productive, as Lovelace proclaims in a letter to Belford, quoting the poetry of Dryden: “It is *resistance* that inflames desire, / Sharpens the darts of love, and blows its fire.” Compliance, on the other hand – what Clarissa purportedly *cannot* do – would paradoxically “disarm[.]” and cool desire: Lovelace continues the citation by noting that “Love is disarm’d that meets with too much ease; / He languishes, and does not care to please.”<sup>83</sup> Dryden’s language is telling here: resistance “sharpens” and “inflames,” arouses and prepares to penetrate, while compliance “disarm[s]” the suitor and effeminizes him, rendering him “languish[ed]” and apathetic. Clarissa, having already articulated this same incongruity in an earlier letter to Anna Howe, recognizes that she must negotiate this delicate balance in her own self-styling. She must continue to straddle the balance between a receptive lover and a virtuous victim if she is to survive Lovelace. In other words, she must be loved enough to ensure her physical safety, but she must, equally, defuse his irascible and explosive advances with cooling compliance: both of which are moves that underscore her relationship with her captor.

After she has been woken into a frenzy by Dorcas, who has sounded the alarm of fire, Clarissa finds herself half-dressed and in Lovelace’s arms. Believing it to be one of his schemes, Clarissa first resists violently, “in broken accents, and exclamations the

most vehement.” She raves menacingly, “looking all wildly round her as if for some instrument of mischief,” and indeed, for her more skeptical readers, this is a rare moment of thrilling resistance: we *want* her to just stab this guy and get away, already.<sup>84</sup> But, crucially, as Lovelace has already suggested in his earlier meditation from Dryden, it is the moment when Clarissa is the most actively resistant that she is the most deeply ensnared. And, indeed, Lovelace is in complete control of the scene, even of this hostile fit: he grabs the scissors easily from her and throws them in the fire, and then “*permit[s]* her to take the chair,” a chilling word that culls the authority and distance characteristic of the true libertine. Her active resistance has inflamed him; he describes her in some of the novel’s most erotic language:

But, oh the sweet discomposure!—Her bared shoulders and arms, so inimitably fair and lovely: her spread hands crossed over her charming neck; yet not half concealing its glossy beauties; the scant coat, as she rose from me, giving the whole of her admirable shape and fine-tuned limbs: her eyes running over, yet seeming to threaten future vengeance: and at last her lips uttering what every indignant look and glowing feature portended; exclaiming as if I had done the worst I could do, and vowing never to forgive me; wilt thou wonder that I could avoid resuming the incensed, the already too-much-provoked fair one?<sup>85</sup>

At this moment, Clarissa is all “discomposure”: Lovelace easily isolates, and even fetishizes, each individual body part, and once again is aroused by the juxtaposition of

her resisting body and the promise of her compliance. Her “bared shoulders” and her “half conceal[ed]” bosom offset her “venge[ful],” “indignant” and “glowing” expression, and Lovelace is first empowered by his interpretation of this “discomposure,” “clasp[ing] her once more to [his] bosom.” But it is Clarissa who then takes control of the scene, regrouping the raw materials of her eroticized parts into another persona:

...it was with the utmost difficulty that I was able to hold her: nor could I prevent her sliding through my arms, to fall upon her knees: which she did at my feet. And there, in the anguish of her soul, her streaming eyes lifted up to my face with supplicating softness, hands folded, disheveled hair; for her night head-dress having fallen off in her struggling, her charming tresses fell down in naturally shining ringlets, as if officious to conceal the dazzling beauties of her neck and shoulders; her lovely bosom too heaving with sighs, and broken sobs, as if to aid her quivering lips in pleading for her – in this manner, but when her grief gave way to her speech, in words pronounced with all that emphatical propriety which distinguishes this admirable creature in her elocution from all the women I ever heard speak; did she implore my compassion, and my honor.<sup>86</sup>

Clarissa’s eyes, formerly “running over,” are now “streaming...with supplicating softness;” her hands, which had “crossed over” her neck, are now penitently “folded;” her bosom now “aids” her “quivering lips” in an impassioned plea. Rather than try to make Lovelace see her as a complete or unified person, Clarissa allows -- indeed, calls

Lovelace's attention to -- the discreteness of each individual part, but contextualizes that part within the broader landscape of her powerlessness and victimization, the staging of a persona that overcomes and then defuses the heat of Lovelace's desire. By encouraging Lovelace's desire for novelty, in emphasizing herself as fragmented, as body parts, she remains attractive enough to be loved; however, by varying the tableau from his virile opportunism to her helpless, and indeed powerless, compliance, both Lovelace and the reader *see* these body parts as already exploited, even though he has not yet penetrated her. His fierce grip is loosened, and she literally "slid[es] through [his] arms."

Clarissa continues this relation; after she escapes Lovelace, she locks herself into her room, allowing her to -- in a very important sense -- *frame* herself for Lovelace. As he prostrates himself at her door, Clarissa positions herself in front of the keyhole. He peers through, eagerly, and sees "her on her knees, her face, though not towards me, lifted up, as well as hands, and these folded, deprecating I suppose that gloomy tyrant's curse."<sup>87</sup> Lovelace is given an entirely new -- and entirely restricted -- vantage point on what is, essentially, an extension of her earlier supplicating posture. His language here registers that he has absorbed, to the extent that he can, her position on the unfolding events, as he begrudgingly admits the weight of the curse that she carries. By sentimentalizing herself and by reframing their relation as emotional rather than as sexual, Clarissa is empowered to fracture Lovelace's totalizing, suffocating gaze: he who could see everywhere, who could see every part of Clarissa, can now only see what she wants him to. Confused in his own strategies, he has been displaced from the center of the action and relegated to his own supplicating position outside her door. Lovelace marvels at her mutability. He exclaims to Belford: "Now is my reformation secured; for I

never shall love any other woman!—Oh she is all variety! She must be ever new to me!”<sup>88</sup>

It is in her dynamic and multiple self-representations and her fluid and relational identity that Clarissa invokes Haywoodian heroines like Fantomina. Fantomina, who constantly reinvents herself and re-presents herself in an effort to maintain her lover Beauplaisir, shares with Clarissa a profound understanding of the ways in which sentimental and erotic bodies can signify and communicate. Just as Fantomina is able to substitute many bodies in an attempt to fix Beauplaisir into constancy, so Clarissa demonstrates the ability here to replicate and preserve relations -- perhaps, Lovelace even suggests, in enduring ways through his ultimate “reformation” -- by rendering herself constantly “ever new.”



## Chapter Three

### *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless: Eliza Haywood's Promiscuous Machines*

Though they are usually assumed to be distant relatives, at best, the previous chapter concluded that amatory heroines like Haywood's Fantomina might have more in common with Clarissa, the virtuous paragon of sentimentality, than is usually thought. The present chapter aims to situate Haywood's later didactic fiction, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) within this same literary-historical context: as a hybrid of amatory and domestic fiction rather than an edifying counter-narrative. I will argue in this chapter that Haywood uncouples feminine morality from virtuous courtship and fixed companionship in *Betsy Thoughtless*, and instead links it with multiple erotic affiliations enabled here by "thoughtlessness," a form of strategic indifference that, I contend, extends and reconfigures the emotional hollowness and critical distance characteristic of male libertinism. To contextualize my claims about *Betsy Thoughtless* within the broader frame of this dissertation, I begin by expanding where the previous chapter left off: opening with a brief, detailed comparison of two scenes from Haywood's *Fantomina* and Richardson's *Clarissa* in order to show how the relational, libertine self acts as a crucial point of connection joining these two otherwise disparate genres.

After she has succumbed to the rake Beauplaisir's first seduction, Haywood's "celebrated Lady," now known as Fantomina, vows to keep their "Intreague...a Secret" to prevent public knowledge of her "Disgrace," and does so by refusing to reveal her true identity. She recognizes the inherent power in preserving this fiction: "while [Beauplaisir] laughs at, and perhaps despises the fond, the yielding *Fantomina*, he will

revere and esteem the virtuous, the reserv'd Lady.”<sup>1</sup> This explicit dualism that Fantomina preserves between authentic person and inauthentic persona, both housed in the same body, characterizes what Helen Thompson calls Haywood's “conflat[ion] of the singular and the serial to assert...that to all men, all women are the same.”<sup>2</sup> But the charms of even Fantomina soon become “tasteless and insipid,” forcing her to construct yet another self in order to maintain Beauplaisir's attention.<sup>3</sup> She becomes Celia, a pretty servant girl, and is promptly seduced:

Coming the next Morning to bring his Chocolate, as he had order'd, he catch'd her by the pretty Leg, which the Shortness of her Petticoat did not in the least oppose; then pulling her gently to him, ask'd her, how long she had been at Service?—How many Sweethearts she had? If she had ever been in Love? and many other such Questions, befitting one of the Degree she appear'd to be: All which she answer'd with such seeming Innocence, as more enflam'd the amorous Heart of him who talk'd to her. He compelled her to sit in his Lap; and gazing on her blushing Beauties, which if possible, receive'd Addition from her plain and rural Dress, he soon lost the Power of containing himself.<sup>4</sup>

Here Haywood's text subtly underscores the overlap between Beauplaisir's effortless attraction and the efforts Fantomina has exerted to seduce him. As her “pretty Leg” slips out of the skirt as if by fortunate accident, we know the “Shortness” to be an intentional costuming; as he gazes on “Beauties” intensified by “plain and rural Dress,” we know

this to be a disguise. Ultimately, Celia's victory is marked by the volatility of Beauplaisir's sexual response:

His wild Desires burst out in all his Words and Actions; he call'd her little Angel, Cherubim, swore he must enjoy her...devour'd her Lips, her Breasts with greedy Kisses, held to his burning Bosom her half-yielding, half-reluctant Body, nor suffer'd her to get loose, till he had ravaged all, and glutted each rapacious Sense with the sweet Beauties of the pretty *Celia*.<sup>5</sup>

Like Celia, who intentionally fluctuates between “half-yielding” and “half-reluctant” in her purposeful attempts to engage Beauplaisir's sexual attention, Richardson's Clarissa embodies similar contradictions in her efforts to connect, emotionally, with Lovelace. After struggling with Clarissa in the fire scene (which I have discussed in more detail in the conclusion to the previous chapter), a heated Lovelace grabs her and threatens, “*Am* I then a villain, madam?—*Am* I then a villain, say you?” He then reports an account of the terrified Clarissa's response: “Oh no!—and yet you are!—And again I was her *dear* Lovelace!—Her hands again clasped over her charming bosom—Kill me! kill me!” Clarissa's behavior is not only contradictory here -- simultaneously disavowing and confirming Lovelace as “villain,” and asking “*dear* Lovelace” to show his love by “kill[ing] her” -- but Lovelace's repeated use of the word “again” suggests that these behaviors replicate a larger pattern of strategic performance, and are perhaps even somewhat suspect in terms of their authenticity. And yet still, these

contradictions have their intended affect: they awe Lovelace into submission, literally “suspend[ing]” him as he marvels at her ability to shift between seductive, sentimental, tragic and pitiful. As he sits “suspended,” she, “with still folded hands, and fresh-streaming eyes,” now calls him “her *blessed* Lovelace.” Again, the contrast between Clarissa’s “still folded hands,” which redirect the reader’s attention again to her martyred posture, and her “fresh-streaming eyes,” which connect her former supplications to the present moment, in which she graciously “blesse[s]” and thanks Lovelace, remind us that she is negotiating at least two roles here: the pitiful, defensive victim and the pious, virtuous paragon, as well as -- as I have contended in the previous chapter -- a self-consciously eroticized lover. Lovelace, overwhelmed by the force of these contradictions, finds himself conquered: he muses to Belford, as he recounts this moment, “What heart but must have been penetrated?”<sup>6</sup> Confirming his submission to Clarissa’s awesome self-representations, Lovelace, like Beauplaisir but to obviously different ends, bursts into a sentimental effusion, repeating “arduous prayers” for Clarissa’s pardon, and -- finding it denied him -- tries to gain the pardon again through force, although he will “sneakingly retire” after receiving it only half-heartedly.<sup>7</sup>

This highly eroticized moment in the novel not only suggests the resonances between *Clarissa* and her amatory predecessors, but also anticipates the important, if equally overlooked, connections this dissertation will draw between the works of Richardson and Sade. Literary-historical approaches to the eighteenth century novel have, it seems, largely ignored comparisons like this one, moments in which moralistic heroines like Clarissa and duplicitous characters like Fantomina behave in corresponding ways to gain strategic advantages over their lovers. Further, while the aims of each

initially seem quite different, with Fantomina seeking a continued intrigue while Clarissa seeks to avoid ruin, inarguably both women manipulate their male lovers in order to enforce moral obligations: Fantomina, through licentious masquerade, demands constancy from her lover, while Clarissa struggles against her inevitable rape by invoking a series of sentimental and erotic self-representations. These moments of overlap are suggestive for rethinking both the established and the alternative trajectories that inform our contemporary understanding of the novel's rise, and further, help to establish the hybridity of texts like *Betsy Thoughtless*. By combining moral and social edification with lascivious portraits of sexual intrigue, *Betsy Thoughtless* connects the pleasures of promiscuity with a more consistent and confident self-knowledge: both of these characteristics are foundational for Betsy's relational sense of identity.

To better understand the segregation of domestic sensibility from amatory fiction in accounts of the novel's rise, I turn to Ros Ballaster's *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740*, widely considered to be the best treatment of the role played by amatory fiction in the evolution of the novel. It opens by describing two texts that bookend the historical period under study: Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and his Sister* (1684) and Richardson's *Pamela* (1740). While Ballaster frames her study within a trajectory that enables Behn's romanticized and dissolute account of courtly intrigue to transition into Pamela's tale of virtuous resistance, she also recognizes that "[t]he distance between" these two texts is "both less and more wide than it at first appears." Notably, for Ballaster, this is because both heroines can be said to "control the scene of representation of their own amatory histories" through the newly-repurposed epistolary register, and so Ballaster recognizes, as I do, the force and power

that the ability to represent selfhood affords literary heroines within the relational contexts of courtship, sex, and marriage. However, Ballaster also maintains that Pamela only triumphs by virtue of her “innocence, her lack of self-consciousness, and integrity of mind,” while Sylvia achieves her goals, in contrast, by embracing “the duplicities of the letter” and by “her consequent ability to manipulate epistolary representation,” which, Ballaster contends, “enable[s] her to engineer her way out of the position of a discarded victim of seduction into that of female libertine.”<sup>8</sup> Yet, as I have just shown, Clarissa also tries to “engineer her way out of the position of discarded victim,” and one way that she does so, my previous chapter argues, is by adopting strategies that align her precisely with libertine tropes of seduction and spontaneous affiliation. And while the novel clearly sets limits on Clarissa’s capacity for pleasurable resistance, the fact that Clarissa actively and repeatedly harnesses a sense of feminine sexual agency clearly aligns her with the amatory heroines Ballaster implies that -- by association, at least -- she must have very little to do with.<sup>9</sup>

What the present chapter seeks to establish, then, is how the tensions between amatory self-representations and the moral requirements of domestic fiction collide in Haywood’s didactic fiction. In *Betsy Thoughtless*, these tensions are embodied in the novel’s central plot: the eponymous heroine’s desire to maintain a “plurality of lovers” despite the strict social demands of companionate marriage. I argue that Haywood’s novel stages an argument about the comparative disadvantages of companionate marriage, given the power and pleasure inherent in the feminine embrace of polyamorous affections. Haywood subverts the expectations of didactic fiction by privileging both promiscuous affections and libertine indifference as ways for women to negotiate a world

plagued by earnest incompatibility: suitors and lovers are mismatched and manipulative, narrators and friends are deceptive and unreliable, men and women share indistinguishable physical and emotional qualities, and sexual double-standards arise at every turn.

As Aleksandra Hultquist has noted, “domestic fiction, rather than rejecting amatory modes—especially scenes of seduction and stories of fallen women—incorporates them to promote their comparatively conservative outcomes.”<sup>10</sup> Hultquist traces an alternative “rise of the novel” account from Haywood’s *Fantomina* through Pamela to *Betsy Thoughtless*, arguing that Haywood “re-appropriates” the emotional and sexual “resourcefulness” that Richardson eschews, thus “challeng[ing] Richardson’s aesthetic and moral ideology of virtue.”<sup>11</sup> I find Hultquist’s claim that Haywood “provides an alternative construction of female subjectivity based on sexual desire” compelling, but disagree that this “alternative” subjectivity is what separates Haywood’s work from Richardson’s. Indeed, her argument that “experiences of seduction, rape, and sexual intrigue shape rather than degrade women’s experience” in *Betsy Thoughtless*, I would contend, could rather equally apply to my understanding of Clarissa as “shaped” by her relations with Lovelace.<sup>12</sup> The present chapter thus aims to address the kinds of epistemological transformations that Betsy’s promiscuity permits as a means of demonstrating her *continuity* with domestic heroines like Clarissa, rather than as a divergence from such trends.

I argue that, in this text, Haywood translates libertine indifference into feminine “thoughtlessness,” and in so doing, illustrates the surprising sexual acuity, intellectual wit, and social perspicacity that courtship enables women to have -- but only women who

refuse to attach to one object.<sup>13</sup> So, the natural goal of courtship, which is supposed to be the gaining and preserving of singular affection, becomes for Betsy Thoughtless a series of transient diversions, with each new conquest strengthening her ability to render herself critically indifferent to male desire while simultaneously preserving and intensifying her own private, self-directed pleasures. It is, Haywood argues, only when Betsy is forced into a marriage and denied sexual freedom that she falls victim to the limiting constraints of exclusive companionship, exacerbated by her incompatibility with the brutish and inconstant Mr. Munden. Thus, for Betsy -- as for Clarissa and Fantomina, and ultimately also, for libertines like Saint-Ange and Eugénie -- erotic affiliations form a useful and pleasurable strategy for shaping male behavior to accord with female desire.<sup>14</sup>

The centrality of critical “indifference” to libertine philosophy has been extensively established, and most suggestively explored, by Gilles Deleuze in his discussion of Sadeian orgy.<sup>15</sup> But scholars have also recognized the role that dispassion plays in amatory fiction. Particularly suggestive for my purposes is Joseph Drury’s claim that Haywood’s early fiction is concerned with “the intensity and complexity of female consciousness produced in the material experience of subjection,” particularly given how Haywood “harnesses the contemporary critique of material determinism, which argued that if human beings were machines they could not be moral.”<sup>16</sup> Like Drury, I want to recast the arguments leveled against Haywood that suggest her representations of thoughtlessness and superficiality -- what William Warner describes as a “shell-like emptiness” -- render impossible any legitimate epistemological or emotional development in a heroine largely characterized by her involuntary impulses.<sup>17</sup> Unlike Drury, however, I assert the resonance of these claims for Haywood’s later fiction. Her



domestic fiction is explicitly engaged in didactic projects, but is also actively seeking to reconcile the dualisms that Drury proposes divide characters “exonerate[d] from moral blame” because they “act on impulse” and those “equipped with a deliberating consciousness that allows them not only to resist desire but also to reflect on the sincerity of other characters who claim they cannot do the same.”<sup>18</sup> *Betsy Thoughtless* both revels in the pleasurable impulses of promiscuous behavior *and* sees these impulses as compatible with a new demand for moral reflection and self-governance. Betsy thus develops a real and lasting self-knowledge through her multiplicity of erotic relations, rather than in their absence. Remaining indifferent to her suitors themselves but titillated by the possibilities and pleasures of their relations, Betsy is free to indulge her desire without the risk of becoming its object.

### **The Possibilities of Dispassionate Promiscuity**

Betsy arrives in London a social novice and, under the guardianship of the mostly apathetic Mr. Goodman and the duplicitous Lady Mellasin, quickly develops and maintains an enviable “plurality of lovers,” with the notable Mr Trueworth one among them. Despite frequent admonitions from friends and guardians -- many of whom are engaged in their own questionable intrigues -- to avoid the appearance of promiscuity, Betsy persists in her belief that “a young woman who ha[s] her fortune” should “be allowed to hear all the different proposals...offered to her on that score.”<sup>19</sup> At least ostensibly, Betsy views promiscuity as a very efficient means to an inevitable end, and remains openly “averse” to the “marriage-state,” until, presumably, a mutually desirable arrangement presents itself.<sup>20</sup> Yet Betsy clearly savors the powerful play of courtship and

thrives on juggling her various suitors' passions, a "fault" that ultimately results in Truworth's abandonment of his suit in favor of the bland Miss Harriot. Betsy, left to her devices, continues to encourage a wealth of suitors until she is convinced to marry Mr Munden; after enduring many miserable months of his abuses, she separates from him and is plunged into a state of painful self-scrutiny. She returns dutifully to care for him on his death-bed, and discovers that Truworth's wife has also passed away in the interim. Finally admitting her real feelings for Truworth, she is reunited with him at the novel's end. In the final lines, the narrator muses, "Thus were the virtues of our heroine (those follies that had defaced them being fully corrected) at length rewarded with a happiness, retarded only till she had render'd herself wholly worthy of receiving it."<sup>21</sup>

*Betsy Thoughtless* thus combines the straightforward "reformed heroine plot" popularized by didactic fiction with the fracturing and variegating effect of episodic narrative. Haywood's novel, then, can be said to embody the tensions between companionate marriage and promiscuity in what John Richetti calls its "loosely-strung" form.<sup>22</sup> It is a text composed mostly of brief episodes, divided into ninety-two relatively short chapters, and often flitting back and forth between several interrelated plots and storylines, with Betsy at the center. The novel's episodic form is also sustained, at least in part, by images of social multiplicity: the revolving door of eighteenth-century London society, the seductive and often insidious "continual round of publick diversions" that Betsy indulges in. From the first moment in her guardian's household, Betsy is initiated into Lady Mellasin's luxurious and corrupting lifestyle of gaming, intrigue, and entertainment. "It cannot" the narrator observes "...seem strange, that Miss Betsy, to whom all things were entirely new, should have her head turned with that promiscuous

enjoyment, and the very power of reflection lost amidst the giddy whirl...”<sup>23</sup> But these formal digressions lessen substantially after Betsy settles into her marriage, and the novel sustains a more pointed focus on the new coupling. Thus, Betsy’s characteristic impulsiveness, her marked lack of “reflection,” becomes explicitly linked with the “promiscuous enjoyments” she experiences in Lady Mellasin’s house, with the novel itself formalizing the tension between self-reflection and promiscuous enjoyment through its stitching-together of Betsy’s private meditations with the frenzied distractions of external “enjoyments.”

Given the significance of Betsy’s repentance at the novel’s end, *Betsy Thoughtless* has historically been read as a product of Haywood’s “conversion,” and was clearly valued by contemporaries like Clara Reeve more for where it ended up than for how it arrived there.<sup>24</sup> Although the novel does appear at the height of a mid-century vogue for didactic fiction, modern critics have tended to find this generic category unsatisfactory.<sup>25</sup> Though *Betsy Thoughtless* is inarguably a story of moral improvement, the similarities between Haywood’s novel and more traditionally didactic fiction are at best superficial, only visible in what Deborah Nestor calls the novel’s “surface narrative.”<sup>26</sup> Haywood’s deeply playful and perverse portrayal of a philandering heroine punished with an abusive marriage makes the novel a significantly more complex portrait of women in the eighteenth-century domestic sphere. Such an impression is only strengthened by the obvious inadequacy of what Paula Backscheider calls “The Story” of Haywood’s fiction: a critical narrative that has sought to divide her early amatory work from her later novels by considering the latter a more conservative product of her mid-life “conversion.”<sup>27</sup> Until very recently, *Betsy Thoughtless* has been considered as exemplary of this more

reactionary fiction, but as critics like Backscheider and Hultquist have observed, the novel reincorporates earlier amatory themes within a domestic frame. As I have suggested, *Betsy Thoughtless* is a novel on the threshold of the newly domestic fiction: love, sexuality, and intrigue collide with the more polite concerns of courtship and family.

A critical limitation of “the Story” is that it suggests that Haywood’s later fiction is the work of an essentially different, “reformed” author, and because it places such a strong emphasis on Haywood’s “conversion” as a *literary* turning point, works that proceed this moment are seen as entirely divergent -- in form, content, and moral -- from those that preceded it. But, as I have suggested, the significance of promiscuity as not only a formal strategy, but also a political and epistemological one, implies a continuous and formative relationship between *Betsy Thoughtless* and early works like *Fantomina* (written thirty years earlier, in 1724). Further, as in her earlier works, in *Betsy Thoughtless* Haywood does not offer an unproblematic account of promiscuity, but details the often too-high price of pleasure for women in a patriarchal society. As in *Fantomina*, for example, where the biological limitations of a pregnancy thwart the heroine’s pleasures, characters like Flora Mellasin and Miss Forward provide cautionary examples of how actual sexual promiscuity -- as opposed to Betsy’s implied, non-physical promiscuity -- throws into relief both the physical limitations and the social prohibitions governing female sexuality in eighteenth-century society.

In *The Female Spectator* (published from 1744 to 1746), Haywood makes a broader case for promiscuous behavior as a way of developing self-knowledge while exerting control over relationships that might otherwise disempower a female author.

Importantly, she frames this argument from the perspective of a reformed coquette, whose own pleasures and sexual play clearly anticipate some of Betsy's courtship practices, in ways similar to other early heroines of her fiction. In Book I, the Female Spectator voices her ostensible penitence by replacing the "Hurry of Promiscuous Diversions" previously enjoyed with the presumably more edifying pursuit of writing. The Spectator vows that she "will draw no flattering Lines...nor attempt to shadow over any Defect with an artificial Gloss," as she was once "the greatest Coquet of them all."<sup>28</sup> Recalling the follies she once considered as pleasures, the Female Spectator now pursues gratification exclusively in the "Consolation" of educating the "Public" regarding the pitfalls of frivolity. Importantly, while she explicitly laments her naïve worship of "Dress, Equipage, and Flattery," she does not actually condemn the behavior, and further suggests that these "Promiscuous Diversions" are precisely what have enabled her to become a worldly and sophisticated writer. Indeed, it is only from this cultivated perspective that the Spectator can insightfully examine the behavior of others. This is, Haywood suggests, the paradox of the reformed coquette: because her knowledge stems from past immoral conduct, her current authority can only be summoned and legitimated through the admission of past indiscretion.<sup>29</sup> Further, and more suggestively for the didactic *Betsy Thoughtless*, the Female Spectator represents promiscuity as a way to maintain interest and power in a fickle world: by promising to appeal to her imagined reader's particular "Curiosity" as well as the broadest possible range of "Tastes" in telling her story, the Spectator makes it repeatedly clear that the onus is on her to attract and seduce as many readers as possible to ensure literary success.<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, Betsy similarly gauges the risks of placing too much importance on a single relationship when she has the considerably more strategic and pleasurable option of encouraging a wealth of suitors. Even in considering Mr. Truworth, her most promising suitor and the man she will freely choose at novel's end, she muses:

...she thought she could be pleased to have such a lover, but could not bring herself to be content that he ever should be a husband. She had too much good sense not to know that it suited not with the condition of a wife to indulge herself in the gaieties she at present did, which though innocent, and, as she thought, becoming enough in the state she now was, might not be altogether pleasing to one, who, if he so thought proper, had the power of restraining them.<sup>31</sup>

The “good sense” Betsy exhibits here underscores the distinction between her own pleasure and that of her imagined husband's. She rightfully recognizes that a marriage will mean sacrificing not only her freedom, but her “gaieties” and pleasures, as she will have to stake her future happiness on “one” who has the irrevocable “power of restrain[t],” even if he does not choose to exercise it.<sup>32</sup> As the Female Spectator also suggests in her analogy of readerly attention, this is a dangerous and ill-advised gamble, given both the likely inconstancy of *and* the extraordinary power afforded to any one particular partner. In contrast, Betsy clearly articulates political and social advantages to remaining single. After Mr. Goodman chastises her for encouraging too many lovers, she tells him bluntly that she does not want a husband, and further “that it seemed strange to

her, that a young woman who had her fortune to make might not be allowed to hear all the different proposals offered to her on that score.”<sup>33</sup> In calling attention to the “strangeness” of such expectations, rather than their blatant unfairness or inequality, Betsy echoes the novel’s larger argument about the disadvantages of singular affection, given how it disempowers women.

Haywood asks if it is categorically wrong for women to define themselves by their conquests, to “value themselves on the number and quality of lovers, as they do upon the number of richness of their cloaths.” Even the otherwise disapproving narrator is forced to admit that accumulating a number of lovers “makes them [women] of consideration in the world,” even as it may strain ties with the odd genuine suitor, as promiscuous women “never...reflect[.] how dear it may sometimes cost those to whom they are indebted for indulging this vanity.”<sup>34</sup> Betsy’s behavior is, in fact, a way for her to exercise an extraordinarily shrewd political awareness: Flora calls her a “perfect Machiavel in love affairs” and Mr. Goodman laments “it was a pity she was not a man, [as] she would have made a rare minister of state.”<sup>35</sup> Betsy’s political savvy is thus directly tied to the alternative identity she carves out for herself – rather than becoming *less* sensitive to other men with every sincere conquest, as is the goal of companionate courtship, she cultivates a keener and more penetrating faculty that prepares her to attract and seduce the next man. She also exhibits a strategic indifference to any one suitor and questions the assumption that male-governed courtship is inherently positive because it is the effortless norm. By being notoriously difficult to win over -- after one suitor rescinds his suit, Betsy complains bitterly “Did he imagine his merits were so extraordinary, that there required no more to obtain, than barely to ask?” -- Betsy openly and repeatedly

questions whether companionate marriage is socially or intellectually advantageous.<sup>36</sup> In contrast, Betsy's sifting of various offers provides ample opportunity to exercise her keen social sensibilities while simultaneously indulging her pleasures: as the book progresses, she transforms from a largely naïve ingénue into someone who "never made a conquest without knowing that she did so."<sup>37</sup>

Though Betsy is, as I have shown, described throughout the novel as "penetrating" and political, she is also always defined by her nominal "thoughtlessness," and in what follows I aim to establish the centrality of this contradiction for Haywood's portrait of domestic female identity, as well as for Haywood's unique brand of amatory didacticism. In particular, the novel's opening portrait of Betsy focuses rather exclusively on her characteristic superficiality, tying this in with her impulsive sensibility. The narrator writes:

...she was not of a humour to give herself much pains in examining, or weighing in the balance of judgment, the merit of the arguments she heard urged, whether for or against any point whatsoever. She had a great deal of wit, but was too volatile for reflection, and as a ship, without sufficient ballast, is tossed about at the pleasure of every wind that blows, so was she hurried thro' the ocean of life, just as each predominant passion directed.

Having established Betsy's oscillating temperament and innate lack of reflection, the narrator continues:



But I will not anticipate that gratification, which ought to be the reward of a long curiosity. The reader, if he has patience to go thro' the following pages, will see into the secret springs which set this fair machine in motion, and produced many actions which were ascribed, by the ill-judging and malicious world, to causes very different from the real ones.<sup>38</sup>

In the second paragraph, the narrator attributes the novel's complications, rather exclusively, to other forces besides Betsy's thoughtlessness: her "secret springs," a phrase which could either indicate her inherent propensities or invisible external phenomena, and the criticism of an "ill-judging and malicious world" which repeatedly misinterprets and misconstrues Betsy's behavior. Thus, even as the narrator initially sets up Betsy's "thoughtlessness" as an internal flaw, she immediately undercuts its severity by indicating how it is deeply affected and even exacerbated by external forces unrelated to Betsy. By emphasizing the multiplicity of influences that form and shape selfhood, the narrator reinforces the relational nature of identity: no one develops in a vacuum. There is something more, the narrator suggests, visible if we peer into Betsy's "secret springs," and that something more will, she promises, "gratify" our collective "curiosity."

Further, though Betsy is not balanced by "ballast," and is impulsive by nature, she is not insensible. Indeed, while

...she had never yet seen the man capable of inspiring her with the least emotions of tenderness, she was quite easy to that point, and wished nothing beyond what she enjoyed, the pleasure of being told she was very

handsome, and gallanted about by a great number of those, who go by the name of very pretty fellows. Pleased with the praise, she regarded not the condition or merits of the praiser, and suffered herself to be treated, presented, and squired about to all public places, either by the rake, the man of honour, the wit, or the fool, the married, as well as the unmarried, without distinction, and just as either fell in her way.<sup>39</sup>

While Betsy is “tost about” by each “predominant passion,” the narrator ascribes this not only to the “great number” of “pretty fellows” that Betsy engages, but also to her extremely discerning taste: no man has yet “inspired” her. It is thus Betsy’s indifference to her suitor’s affections that allows her to “wish...nothing beyond what she enjoyed,” and to further encourage, without guilt or regret, the pleasing variety of those who compete for her affections. Betsy’s ability to remain emotionally unattached is what enables her to remain in control of these multiple affiliations and to be “[p]leased with the praise” only, while eschewing “the condition or the merits of the praiser,” and thus to avoid engaging with any concerns symptomatic of lasting companionship. By refusing to humanize her suitors and objectifying them by only valuing their qualitative, external characteristics, Betsy practices a form of libertine indifference elsewhere advocated by characters like Lovelace and Dolmancé, who equally objectify their conquests.

For the majority of the novel, this kind of behavior is explicitly condemned by Betsy’s friends, yet it is important to note that it is rather emphatically reinforced by her guardian in what we might consider Betsy’s formative moment and introduction into the world of courtship: her first real suitor, Mr. Saving. Mr. Goodman, after discovering Mr.

Saving's affections to be genuine, but rightfully concerned that the elder Saving will disapprove of the marriage, approaches Betsy to gauge her sense of the situation. He fears that Betsy will love Mr. Saving and be heartbroken to discover that she is unlikely to be a suitable match; he is "extremely glad to find," on the contrary, "how indifferent that young lover was to her," confusingly praising her "indifference" while still demanding her compliance. He then proceeds to tell Betsy that he has already dissuaded Saving, which the narrator hints might be perceived by her as a misstep, as "it is certain she took an infinite pleasure in the assiduities of his passion." "[I]t is therefore highly probable," the narrator continues, "that [Betsy] imagined he meddled in this affair more than he had any occasion to have done."<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, rather than the more experienced Mr. Goodman stepping in to teach Betsy a lesson here, as is the explicit intention of the chapter, Betsy's thoughtlessness leads to her prompt dismissal of his advice, only to learn the same lesson pages later from another experience with the suitor Gayland. Thus, it is an "accident" with Gayland -- not Goodman's lecture -- "which shewed her own to her in a light very different from what she had ever seen it," stressing the greater value of Betsy's firsthand experiences over the mentorship of her friends.<sup>41</sup>

In what follows, I explore the troubling assessment of Betsy's libertine behavior from within the male-dominated institution of courtship that Haywood ultimately critiques. Betsy's behavior, while often markedly unexceptional in a world governed by duplicitous suitors and hypocritical "friends," often signifies her resistance to the unfair norms and standards demanded of unmarried women. Betsy, who ultimately cannot escape the insidious double-standards she clearly despises, finds ways to capitalize on the

expectations of courtship in the eighteenth-century while delaying their ostensible aim: the cultivation and enjoyment of a singular, lasting affection.

### **(Fe)Male Libertinism and the Double-Standards of Courtship**

I am not the first to suggest that *Betsy Thoughtless* represents political problems within a proto-feminist framework. Beth Fowkes Tobin, in her introduction to the Oxford Classics' edition, argues that Betsy's "thoughtlessness exposes the social institutions and economic conditions that shape women's lives as repressive and hostile to expressions of female power."<sup>42</sup> Thus, while Betsy's behavior in and of itself may often be suspect, its obtrusion in the social world of the novel "exposes" the impossible patriarchal standards demanded by institutions like the companionate marriage. Here Betsy's "thoughtlessness" is imposing, blatant, resistant: it disrupts and displaces. Emily Hodgson Anderson takes a somewhat different view. In her thoughtful "state," Anderson argues, "Betsy cannot engage in any form of self-conscious performance, but instead mindlessly repeats the roles presented to her by society."<sup>43</sup> In Anderson's formulation, "thoughtlessness" is reflexive but also redemptive: Betsy replicates expected "roles" rather than more active, "self-conscious performances" -- at least until she finally "adopt[s]" a strategy of controlled performance like Fantomina, which, Anderson argues, "enables the expression of female emotions" in meaningful and purposive ways."<sup>44</sup> This, I would underscore, transforms her role into that usually occupied by a male libertine. Helen Thompson provides a third and more nuanced way to conceive of Betsy's "thoughtlessness." Her remarkable lack of "ballast" might enable her exploitation, but it also prevents any substantive transformation: Betsy is thus

emphatically “anti-exemplary” because she is so demonstrably unaffected by the social forces that dominate the novel.<sup>45</sup> Thus “thoughtlessness” insulates Betsy in many ways, as I have claimed, but ultimately also isolates her and prevents her from enjoying positive or transformative relationships in the novel.

While feminist critics, then, have sought to uncover fuller epistemological and political possibilities in how Betsy relates to social institutions within the novel, they often find the relationships lacking -- primarily, I argue, because they all in various ways understand transformation as only possible within lasting relationships, like the companionate marriage. It is only, I contend, when moral development is uncoupled from the institution of marriage, and attached instead to the more transient and superficial pleasures Betsy enjoys, that we are able to recognize and identify the myriad ways in which Betsy develops throughout the novel. Her “thoughtlessness” and indifference then serve to insulate Betsy emotionally from the kinds of attachments that would prematurely stunt her ability to develop a particularized self-knowledge. Yet throughout, the novel continues to return to the companionate marriage as a “reward” for virtuous behavior, even as it problematizes its fundamental premise: the ideal of the “virtuous” female as a corrective to uncurbed male sexual freedom. In what follows, I explore how this tension manifests itself in Haywood’s work, underscoring the ways in which Betsy’s libertine indifference enables her to resist the institution of marriage as a way of, paradoxically, better readying her for its fullest expression: her honest and unhesitating choice of Mr. Truworth.

In many ways, *Betsy Thoughtless* exemplifies the “trauma of gender” that feminist theorist Helene Moglen has diagnosed in the novel form. According to Moglen,

It was in the novel, more than in any other expressive form, that the social and psychological meanings of gender difference were most extensively negotiated and exposed. At one level, these innovative fictions demonstrated how the ideals of masculinity and femininity were translated into social roles, and they established norms for that translation. At another level, they expressed resistance to the wrenching system of differentiation and revealed the psychic costs that it incurred.<sup>46</sup>

In her refusal to adhere to “ideals of...femininity,” Betsy clearly “express[es] resistance to the wrenching system of differentiation” that allows men a remarkable range of freedoms and experiences while unfairly limiting her to one possible kind of life: that enabled by a monogamous marriage. By embracing promiscuity, Betsy actively carves out an alternative identity for herself and displaces the male libertine by enjoying her own sexual and social freedoms. Thus, even in her resistance to the social roles prescribed to her, in her “ambiguously gendered” and “sexually initiating” role, Betsy would still seem to maintain the dominant “sex-gender system” that would consider promiscuity a nominally masculine enterprise by embodying the same traits as those that characterize male libertines.

This tendency may have its roots in Haywood’s own sense of the female author as having to occupy a nominally masculine role. The linking of female promiscuity with authorial prolixity was a charge leveled at Haywood by male authors like Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope, who connected her copious literary output with a supposedly

voracious sexual appetite. In *The Dunciad* (1728), “Dulness,” the odious muse of Pope’s satire on intellectual industry, judges a pissing contest in which publishers William Chetwood and Edmund Curll compete for the rights to Haywood’s bastardized literary offspring. “Two babes of love” -- two of Haywood’s salacious amatory novels, named by Pope in an accompanying footnote, *The New Utopia* (1724) and *The Count of Carimania* (1726). As Haywood “stands confessed” in the center, Dulness decrees “His be yon Juno of majestic size, / With cow-like udders, and with ox-like eyes.”<sup>47</sup> Haywood, a perverse mixture of cow’s body and ox’s perspicacity, clutching her “babes,” obstinately persists as the specimen of authoress-whore, conflating literal with literary promiscuity by mothering texts outside the established patrimonial bloodline.<sup>48</sup> Swift writes “Corinna,” a poem that collapses Haywood and at least one of her predecessors, Delarivier Manley, into the eponymous subject of a raunchy lampoon.<sup>49</sup> Born blessed by Apollo, the “subtle jade” as an infant “seem[s] to laugh and squall in rhymes,” but as the love-child of Cupid and Satyr, becomes a prodigy of smut. “At twelve,” Swift tells us, she matures to a “wit and a coquette” who subsequently “Marries for love, half whore, half wife; / Cuckolds, elopes, and runs in debt, / Turns authoress, and is Curll’s for life.” The poem culminates with a peep into her “commonplace-book,” replete with “gallan[try],” a “cornucopia” overflowing with “scandal” that is filled to such an excess, she can simply “pour[...] it out” to create her fiction.<sup>50</sup>

Haywood is targeted by Swift and Pope for her extraordinary popularity and her propensity for penning explicit literature; as Ballaster glosses, “[w]omen’s writing is here metaphorized as a form of unrepentant prostitution, in which the women’s body is turned for profit.”<sup>51</sup> Though publishers like Curll are also indicted by association -- particularly,

in Pope -- it is the woman writer whose morals and motives are questioned and who must either reform, by conforming to male expectations, or risk becoming ostracized as a prostitute. Indeed, as Katherine Sobba Green indicates, these accusations by male authors may have been the impetus for Haywood's interest in didactic literature and purported conversion: she notes that Haywood "demonstrated a marked shift toward...morality...in her works (largely anonymous) published after the 1728 *Dunciad*."<sup>52</sup>

That Haywood was thus affected by, as well as deeply conscious of and critical of the double-standard governing female sexual behavior in eighteenth-century London is equally well-documented. In a recent article, David Oakleaf has presented compelling evidence that Haywood drew Betsy Thoughtless's character from a real-life prostitute, Betsy Careless, who worked Haywood's Covent Garden neighborhood. According to Oakleaf, she fascinated Haywood because she so exemplified the same paradox of female knowledge that underlies the plot of *Betsy Thoughtless*: as he frames it, "How can a young woman taste the commercial delights of the city without circulating as public property (a prostitute) rather than private (wife or potential wife)?"<sup>53</sup> *Betsy Thoughtless*, I have contended, offers a solution to this paradox, arguing for a "plurality of lovers" -- an implied, but not *actual*, promiscuity -- as the only available strategy for a woman seeking to shape self-knowledge and to fully comprehend the political and social stakes of male/female relationships *before* they -- ultimately, as they must -- willingly and knowingly enter into a marriage. Limiting oneself too early to only one partner in the least risks curtailing the range of experiences necessary for a healthy and substantial



growth, and, at worst, may result in socially-sanctioned abuse, neglect, or exploitation at the hands of an immoral husband.

The reader is thus often invited to compare the severity of Betsy's freedoms with those enjoyed by prominent male figures and ostensible role models in her life, including her brother Andrew Thoughtless. Haywood thus draws explicit connections between Betsy's behavior and that of the novel's rakes and libertines, who are often encouraged and rewarded for their behavior while Betsy is chastised and punished. When asked by Mr. Goodman to assume guardianship of Betsy upon his arrival in London, Andrew replies:

...as I am a single man, I shall have a crowd of gay young fellows continually coming to house, and I cannot answer that all of them would be able to behave with that strict decorum, which I should wish to see always observed toward a person so near to me...In fine...it is a thing wholly inconsistent with the freedom I propose to live in...<sup>54</sup>

Here Haywood stringently juxtaposes the limited capacity Betsy enjoys for social pleasure against the normalized "proposed" freedoms her brother enjoys, underscoring how these behaviors are paradoxically "wholly inconsistent" despite being explicitly identical. (Betsy also enjoys being followed around by "a crowd of gay young fellows," who rarely "behave...with strict decorum.") Further, Andrew is willing to leave his sister in a precarious, and indeed demonstrably vulnerable, position at Mr Goodman's in order to keep enjoying his "freedoms," an argument Betsy understandably finds "so weak, and

withal so unkind, that she could not forbear bursting into tears.”<sup>55</sup> But this is, in fact, not even the real story. The reader discovers that Andrew’s real motivation stems from a desire to keep secret his mistress, with whom he has traveled from France. Andrew’s duplicity highlights the doubly-offensive nature of the sexual double standard: not only is he permitted to enjoy such freedoms, but he is in fact permitted to enjoy them so unquestionably as to be able to use them as an acceptable front for even more morally reprehensible behavior.

Andrew’s blatant disloyalty, not to mention the demonstrable unfairness of this situation, make such an impression on the text that the narrator is scarcely able to cull her usual critique of Betsy’s behavior in the chapter following:

It was the fate of Miss Betsy to attract a great number of admirers, but never to keep alive, for any length of time, the flame she had inspired them with. – *Whether this was owing to the inconstancy of the addressers, or the ill conduct of the person addressed, cannot absolutely be determined, but it is highly probable that both these motives might sometimes concur to the losing her so many conquests.*<sup>56</sup>

After Andrew has so glaringly demonstrated the extent to which single male suitors can be inconstant, disloyal, and fickle -- without reprobation -- the narrator can no longer reasonably indict Betsy for her own refusal to find a committed partner. The narrator, who is otherwise quick to cast aspersions on Betsy’s behavior, is more measured here: Betsy is not exclusively at fault. Indeed, while the narrator frequently describes Betsy as

a flirtatious and even silly girl who lacks the coolness of introspection and the dispassion of self-control -- and while her suitors are afforded considerably more sympathetic portraits, this does not align with how Betsy views herself, or her suitors. The initial description of Betsy as “too volatile for reflection” does not resonate with Betsy’s remarkable consistency in her aversion to marriage and her demonstrable agency in negotiating with her suitors. Betsy, in fact, characterizes her suitors in language identical to the description the narrator makes of *her* at the novel’s opening:

As the barometer, said she to herself, is governed by the weather, so is the man in love governed by the woman he admires: he is a *meer machine* – acts nothing of himself,--has no will or power of his own, but is lifted up, or depressed, just as the charmer of his heart is in the humour. I wish, continued she, I knew what day these poor creatures would come,--though ‘tis no matter,--I have got it seems possession of their hearts, and their eyes will find graces in me, let me appear in what shape soever.<sup>57</sup>

The similarities are striking: just as Betsy is described as a “ship...tost about” by the waves, so her suitors are “barometer[s]” registering and affected by natural forces. As Betsy is a “fair machine,” mechanistic and transparent, so her suitors are “meer machine[s],” predictably responsive to Betsy’s demands and whims. Indeed, this comparison even suggests that male suitors possess *less* agency in love, as Betsy’s fluctuations are largely internal, a function of alternating and conflicting “passions” while men “ha[ve] no will or power of [their] own.” These depictions resonate with a standard

Haywoodian observation that the “graces” of women are not inherent, but socially-ascribed, and thus arbitrary and often superficial, discoverable only in external shape -- as in *Fantomina*, where Haywood poses the pressing question of whether or not women (or men) can possess anything like intrinsic virtue, or if indeed all of social life is a form of masquerade. Betsy’s recognition that men “will *find* graces in” her shows her again to be particularly perceptive about the emphasis on externality and superficiality in courtship. As a rake or libertine often pursues only external beauties and superficial pleasures under the guise of more emotional and meaningful attachments, Betsy similarly controls and distances herself from the raw emotions of her suitors.

In contrast to Betsy’s supposed lack of emotional and social faculties -- her “thoughtlessness” -- she is possessed of a “natural” vanity, a propensity that is, throughout the novel, intensified by the behavior of her family and friends in appraising her of the most advantageous marriage. For example, Betsy’s first suitor, whose bashfulness and reserve is “so different from what she had observed in any other of those who had pretended to lift themselves under the banner of her charms,” finally “convinc[es] her of the conquest she had made,” and it is in the triumph of his singular attention to her that her vanity, “so natural to a youthful mind,” is “awakened in her breast.”<sup>58</sup> However, rather than convince her that she should marry him, this sensation “hurries” her into “indulg[ent] liberties” and a “love of pleasure” -- in short, inspiring her to more promiscuous behavior and to seek similar engagements with more suitors.<sup>59</sup> This “natural” inclination towards indulging vanity by accumulating pleasures is thus intensified, and not truncated, by courtship practices that reduce lovers to “conquests” and, further, that demand duplicity and strategy in every negotiation. As Lady Trusty

laments, in London “there are but too frequent proofs, that an innate principle of virtue is not always a sufficient guard against the many snares laid for it, under the shew of innocent pleasures, by wicked and designing persons of both sexes.” In short, Trusty muses, “the reputation may suffer, though virtue triumphs,” deploring that actual physical “virtue” matters considerably less than socially-determined “reputation.”<sup>60</sup> Thus, as Trusty notes, feminine virtue is, in fact, a liability in London; her emphasis, further, on the “snares laid” by “persons of both sexes” underscores the necessity of being political or even duplicitous in order to avoid becoming a victim. Though Trusty advocates isolation from society and the simplicity of country life as a way to “wean” Betsy “by degrees, from any ill habits she might have contracted in that Babel of mixed company she was accustomed to at Lady Mellasin’s,” the early corruption of Betsy by the coquettish Miss Forward testifies, as does the occasion of her near-rape at Oxford, the fact remains that the country is equally precarious, and perhaps more so because it does not offer the anonymity of the city.<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, when juxtaposed with the behavior of the social communities that surround her, Betsy’s “thoughtlessness” and vanity often seem less exceptionable. The novel, in fact, juxtaposes Betsy’s pleasurable antics with serious cautionary tales regarding the pitfalls of sexual promiscuity. Miss Forward, Lady Mellasin, and Miss Flora all serve as reminders that actual sexual freedom is curbed and punished by stringent moral laws circumscribing the behavior of women. Miss Forward, whose early talent for playing “the coquette” and predilection for the game of “fast-and-loose” serves as a model for Betsy in her school years, finds herself pregnant and abandoned, becoming a prostitute upon her arrival in London. Lady Mellasin, whose affair with a criminal

results in her robbing her husband, Mr. Goodman, is thrust from the house with her daughter and ruined socially and financially for her indiscretion. Flora, whose multiple lovers repeatedly reject her as a viable marriage candidate, seduces Mr. Trueworth by playing an Incognita, but is abandoned by him when he decides to marry the virtuous Miss Harriot.

In contrast, Betsy -- whose repeated experiences with duplicitous and violent suitors have allowed her to develop a discerning ethics -- distinguishes her playful and purposive practice of encouraging multiple lovers from the serious loss of control that these other women exhibit. For example, after catching Flora in a compromising position with the rakish Gayland, Betsy reflects:

‘What...could induce her to sacrifice her honour? Declarations of love were not new to her. She heard every day the flatteries with which our sex are treated by the men, and needed not to have purchased the assiduities of any one of them at so dear a rate. Good God! are innocence and the pride of conscious virtue, things of so little estimation, as to be thrown away for the trifling pleasure of hearing a few tender protestations? Perhaps all false and uttered by one whose heart despises the easy fondness he has triumphed over, and ridicules the very grant of what he has solicited.’<sup>62</sup>

Here Betsy astutely recognizes that sexual “innocence” and “conscious virtue” -- both of which depend on physical and emotional freedom -- will cost “dear[ly]” if lost, both in terms of reputation and in terms of a possible victimization. Betsy also emphasizes the

contradictions inherent in male affection: though “fondness” should be easily won, given the terms of companionate courtship, it will be “despised,” because it means that a woman has “grant[ed]” too freely what the lover has “solicited.” In moments like this, Betsy’s desire to “hear the proposals of a hundred lovers, had as many offered themselves” not only seems the viable choice, but ultimately displaces and subverts the male libertines who do the same, and who do so with “ridicule” and “false[hood].”<sup>63</sup>

However, Betsy is also punished for her promiscuous behavior throughout the novel, mostly through social means: ostracization, gossip, and scandal, limitations that Haywood often seems to align -- in severity and in emotional impact -- with more morally deterministic sanctions like the loss of virginity. The difference, Haywood notes, is that scandal and gossip are the hypocritical measures instituted by communities that are often equally immoral. Men are often indicted for hypocrisy, as in the example of Andrew Thoughtless I have cited above. In another case, after Betsy is nearly raped at Oxford, she is driven out of town by the scandalous rumors circulated about her, and by the abusive, “continual affronts,” and “fresh insults,” of the students – “who all having got the story, thought they had a fine opportunity of exercising their poetic talent; satires and lampoons flew about like hail...copies of them handed about through the whole town, to the great propagation of scandal, and the sneering faculty.”<sup>64</sup> While the narrator finds the condition of Betsy and Flora “truly pitiable” in this instance, she is perhaps even more disturbed by the harsh treatment that women often receive from “those of their own sex.” In the opening paragraph of the novel, when the narrator observes that “[t]he ladies...are apt to make too little allowances to each other...and seem better pleased with an occasion to condemn, than to excuse.”<sup>65</sup>

Indeed, Betsy cannot escape the moral scrutiny of the narrative itself, nor can she the hypocrisy of a narrator who laments the cruelties of the female sex while exhibiting the same sanctimonious behavior. The novel's intrusive, Fieldingesque narrator often assumes the voice of a scolding matron. After receiving a letter from Lady Trusty in which she expresses grave concern over Betsy's recent behavior in Oxford – where she is almost raped by an opportunistic “gentleman-commoner” – Betsy sits down to “cast[...] a retrospect on several past transactions she had been witness of, as well as those she had been concerned in herself,” the letter having “made a strong impression on her.”<sup>66</sup> As she ruminates on her past experience, the narrator indirectly relays to the reader her private thoughts:

...she began to wonder at, and condemn the vanity of being pleased with such shadowy nothings:--such fleeting, unsubstantial delights, accompanied with noise and hurry in the possession, and attended with weariness and vexation of spirit.---A multiplicity of admirers seemed to her now among this number,--her soul confessed, that to encourage the addresses of a fop, was both dangerous and silly, and to flatter with vain hopes the sincere passion of a man of honour, was equally ungenerous and cruel.

These considerations were very favorable to Mr. Trueworth,--she ran through every particular of that gentleman's character and behavior, and could find nothing which could make her stand excused even to



herself, for continuing to treat him with the little seriousness she had hitherto done.<sup>67</sup>

The reader who encounters only this passage would likely conclude that Betsy has definitely seen the error of her ways. According to the narrator, she “condemns” her “vanity,” and deeply acknowledges, through her soul’s confession, that she should no longer encourage the suitors she cannot seriously entertain, nor “flatter” her suitors’ “sincere passion” because it is cruel. The narrator concludes, presumptively, that such “considerations” on Betsy’s part are “very favourable” for Truworth, as Betsy’s decision to abandon the “fleeting, unsubstantial delights” of playful courtship seems to necessitate considering Truworth’s proposal with a level “seriousness.” The narrator, in making this presumption, aligns herself with the documented wishes of Betsy’s friends, including Lady Trusty and her brother, whose recent letters have both advocated strongly for Truworth.

However, the reader receives these thoughts twice-removed, filtered by a narrative voice that has not only been intrusive, but opinionated and explicitly and openly manipulative.<sup>68</sup> A quick review of the paragraph hints at such biases. For example, it seems unlikely that Betsy would be “weari[ed]” or “vex[ed]” by the courtship games she herself revels in -- indeed, often incites.<sup>69</sup> The phrases “shadowy nothings” and “fleeting, unsubstantial delights” appear overly harsh and self-critical for Betsy to think about herself. This instance of free indirect discourse reiterates the interest of a manipulative narrator who scrutinizes and evaluates her behavior unfavorably. Further, the narrator invites the reader to join her in “examin[ing]...the effects” of such “late occurrences” on

*“the mind.”* The reader is thus quite conscious that this is a moment of unguarded exposure, where Betsy’s thoughts are laid open for evaluation, and the invitation extended to “examine” them as one might a specimen. However, because these thoughts are filtered, the conclusion that Betsy now “favour[s]” Truworth is at best an *interpretation* of Betsy’s frame of mind, if not a blatant manipulation on the part of the narrator.

That this reading of Betsy’s thoughts is questionable, at best, is supported by the following paragraph, in which Betsy’s voice penetrates through the indirect discourse and offers the reader a direct, spoken account of her thoughts. Immediately following the narrator’s conclusion that Betsy is prepared to take Truworth’s proposals more “serious[ly],” Betsy speaks for herself:

‘What then shall I do with him?’ said she to herself. ‘Must I at once discard him,—desire him to desist his visits, and tell him I am determined never to be his!—or must I resolve to think of marrying him, and henceforward entertain him, as the man who is really ordained to one day be my husband!—I have at present rather an aversion, than an inclination to a wedded state, yet if my mind should alter in this point, where shall I find a partner so qualified to make me happy in it?—but yet,’ continued she, ‘to become a matron at my years, is what I cannot brook the thought of....’<sup>70</sup>

Immediately the reader can see the discrepancies. Betsy's thoughts are, indeed, "favourable to Truworth," but not in the definite and fixed ways that the narrator has suggested. While Betsy admits that he would be an excellent and affable "partner," she still possesses an inherent "aversion" to the "wedded state" that makes such a pairing currently unthinkable -- so much so, in fact, that she is even entertaining the thought of having him "desist his visits" and "tell[ing] him [she is] determined never to be his." Though Betsy is now conscious of her feelings for Truworth, her ruminations have only strengthened her resolve to remain unattached -- she refuses to marry someone purely because they are "ordained" by her friends, and will not "brook the thought" until her mind "alter[s] in this point." Thus, she does not reject her former behavior outright, nor does she condemn herself, as the narrator has suggested. Rather, she searches for a way to continue to be promiscuous and to circumvent Truworth's expectations of monogamy without placing herself in increasingly precarious situations: in short, a partial acquiescence that will permit her continued freedoms. In her subsequent reply to Lady Trusty -- yet another manifestation of Betsy's direct voice, unfiltered by narration -- she pleads: "I will own to you yet further, madam, that I am not insensible of the merits of Mr Truworth, nor of the advantages, which would attend my acceptance of his proposals, but *I know not how it is, I cannot all at once bring myself into a liking of the marriage state.*"<sup>71</sup> The conclusiveness with which the narrator has formerly represented Betsy's decision is faulty. Betsy, while owning that she does not fully know her reasons, remains consistent and clear in her desire to remain unattached, and further, in her refusal to be rushed "all at once" to consider marriage. Such a formal discrepancy reinforces the depth of Betsy's struggle against the dominant narratives of courtship and marriage in the

novel. Through these dissonances, the reader is able to experience and sympathize with Betsy's defiance and her resistance to how others want to normalize and defuse her behavior. It is these moments of discrepancy, I argue, that form the basis for the ways in which promiscuity acts as a kind of necessary moral alternative for Betsy in the novel, allowing her to claim some measure of autonomy, paradoxically, by maintaining a plurality of attachments instead of the *one* that her friends demand.

As we approach the novel's end, Betsy endures many hardships: she loses the friendship of Truworth, consents to marry Munden, and suffers Munden's violent behavior, including his despicable murder of her beloved pet squirrel (a gift from Truworth). Haywood suggests that the accumulation of these experiences have allowed Betsy to weigh her past and present behavior with considerable insight -- and what Betsy ultimately laments is that she has been, on the whole, "inconsistent with [her]self." In this moment, frequently read as her true "reformation," she rebukes herself for playing the part of a "coquet," a "character" she "*knew*" to be "both silly and insignificant." Yet her reform is marked not by a lamentation of her girlish ignorance, as we might expect, but instead by a painful recognition of her *self-knowledge*: she repeatedly asserts that she "had sense," that she was "no fool," that she had clear "discern[ment]," but that she willingly behaved as a "strange creature."<sup>72</sup> Given her fervent desire to reform and her powerful self-realization, one would expect that the novel speedily moves towards resolution at this point -- but, crucially, it *doesn't*. Indeed, it is only after Betsy has finally "[seen] herself and the errors of her past conduct in their true light" that her newfound resolve is challenged by ever more painful trials: the discovery of her husband's affair, their legal separation, his death, and the resurgence of feelings for

Trueworth, now presumed to be lost forever. When she is finally reunited with Trueworth and willingly chooses to marry him in the final chapter, the narrator comments that her “virtues” are “at length rewarded with a happiness, retarded only till she had render’d herself worthy of receiving it.”<sup>73</sup> The emphasis here is, importantly, on Betsy’s continued agency, now channeled into less lascivious pursuits: in order to marry Trueworth, she “render[s] herself worthy,” rather than allowing her virtue to be circumscribed by the expectations of others. In other words, Betsy’s behavior at the end of the novel does not represent a break from her past actions, but rather their continuation -- indeed, perhaps, their fullest expression.

The novel’s moments of resistance and even, as the previous example illustrates, of “reformation,” serve to throw into relief Betsy’s struggle for autonomy and self-definition in a world that denigrates female sexual power, while simultaneously flaunting her embrace of orgiastic, communal pleasures in the “hurry of promiscuous diversions” that is London society. In a brief conclusion, I turn my attention from the figure of Betsy to the setting of London, which Haywood paints as a hedonistic and pleasure-oriented world. Betsy’s willing embrace of all London has to offer, as well as her eager consumption of its libertine pleasures, models in brief the kind of sexual education that D.A.F. Sade will expand to excess in his *roman libertin*, the subject of Chapter Four.

### **Conclusion: “The Babel of Mixed Company”**

Consciously invoking the Restoration theatre as a space of social spectacle, Betsy Thoughtless goes to the playhouse to be seen. And she is: her act of accompanying the morally-suspect Miss Forward is its own spectacle, resulting in much reprobation from

her friends, earning particular disapproval from Mr. Trueworth. As Betsy takes her seat, she begins to reflect on how “his admonition testified the most zealous and tender care for her reputation,” and she thinks “seriously” about his affection in a way that – as has been the case throughout the novel – is conducive to imagining him as a lifelong companion, even as she remains adverse to becoming his wife.<sup>74</sup> But the launch of the play banishes these thoughts: “the brilliant audience, -- the musick, -- the moving scenes exhibited on the stage, and above all the gallantries, with which herself and Miss Forward were treated, by several gay young gentleman...soon dissipated all those reflections, which it was so much her interest to have cherished, and she once more relapsed into her former self” -- a self absorbed by external, communal pleasures.<sup>75</sup> This scene comes just prior to a formative and climactic moment in the novel: Betsy’s embrace of these “gallantries” leads to her being escorted home by a rake, who then attempts to rape her and only desists when she collapses, seeing her to be “truly virtuous,” and thus not a suitable victim for his refined “appetites of nature.”<sup>76</sup> The eager “libertine,” Haywood suggests, is not truly vicious but, in fact, “a man of pleasure,” of “honour,” and of “good sense.”<sup>77</sup> These are, of course, all qualities that have been attached throughout the novel to Betsy herself. Indeed, even as Betsy suffers an extreme mortification from this event, ultimately, the novel concedes, this is simply the risk incurred by indulging promiscuous pleasures: that perhaps you will simply collide against the proclivities of another, and have to negotiate the limits of these competing desires.

Throughout the novel, Haywood paints a portrait of communal pleasures, indulged freely through performance and spectacle, and juxtaposes them to considerably more precarious, self-interested relationships: the rake’s entitlement to rape a “non-

virtuous" woman, or the suitor's duplicitous strategies for ensnaring a woman into marriage. Yet it is only through such communal pleasures -- "promiscuous Diversions" -- that women can indulge their natural love of variety and gallantry freely, and so it is unfortunate that they incur both public and private risks. Novels like Richardson's *Clarissa* also echo this problem, linking the retreat to privacy with increasingly precarious options for a woman engaged in the play and pleasures of courtship.<sup>78</sup> The next chapter reads a text that transforms the privacy of the *boudoir* into a public and mutual space of pleasure: a spectacle reminiscent of the decadence of Haywood's playhouse, but liberated from the moral constraints of public scrutiny. Like Betsy, the young ingénue will have her "head turned" with "a hurry of promiscuous diversions;" unlike Betsy, she will only become increasingly *more* socially and politically liberated as she indulges herself in these diversions, and will only meet with the approbation of her friends, not their disapproval.

## Chapter Four

### *La Philosophie dans le boudoir: Communal Sexuality and Mutual Pleasure*

It is, no doubt, surprising to suggest that the elaborate, spectacular orgies of D.A.F., Marquis de Sade, may have had their origins in the claustrophobic, stark interiors of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, but this chapter takes this origin as a crucial premise. Critics like Lynn Festa and Thomas O. Beebee have rather exhaustively traced Richardson's influence on the sentimental fiction of the Continent, from his faithful French translator Abbé Prévost to his German translator Johann David Michaelis, but it is ultimately Sade himself who offers the most convincing case for the influence of Richardson, and of *Clarissa*, on his work.<sup>1</sup> He writes in "Idées sur les romans":

C'est Richardson, c'est Fielding qui nous ont appris que l'étude profonde du coeur de l'homme, véritable dédale de la nature, peut seul inspirer le romancier...si après douze ou quinze volumes, l'immortel Richardson eût *verteusement* fini par convertir *Lovelace*, et par lui faire *paisiblement* épouser *Clarisse*, eût-on versé à la lecture de ce Roman, prise dans le sens contraire, les larmes délicieuses qu'il obtient de tous les êtres sensibles? c'est donc la nature qu'il faut saisir quand on travaille ce genre, c'est le coeur de l'homme, le plus singulier de ses ouvrages, et nullement la vertu, parce que la vertu, quelque belle, quelque nécessaire qu'elle soit, n'est pourtant qu'un des modes de ce coeur étonnant, dont la profonde



etude est nécessaire au romancier, et que le Roman, miroir fidèle de ce coeur, doit nécessairement en tracer tous les plis.

[‘Tis Richardson, ‘tis Fielding, who have taught us that the profound study of man’s heart—Nature’s veritable labyrinth—alone can inspire the novelist...Imagine, for a moment: if the immortal Richardson, after twelve or fifteen volumes, had *virtuously* concluded by converting Lovelace, and by having him *peacefully* marry Clarissa, would the reader, when the novel was thus turned round, have shed the delightful tears it now wrings from every sensitive soul?

‘Tis therefore Nature that must be seized when one labors in the field of fiction, ‘tis the heart of man, the most remarkable of her works, and in no wise virtue, because virtue, however becoming, however necessary it may be, is yet but one of the many facets of this amazing heart, whereof the profound study is so necessary to the novelist, and the novel, the faithful mirror of this heart, must perforce explore its every fold.]<sup>2</sup>

What Sade credits “the immortal Richardson” with, here, is the pivotal turn from privileging virtue in his own writing -- what has, rather ironically, disqualified Sade from most studies of sentimental fiction -- while still, ultimately, claiming the “heart of man” to be the “profound study” of his novels.<sup>3</sup> If we take Sade’s suggestion seriously that Richardson engages in a kind of natural sensibility that escapes the purposes of virtue --

and neither Sade nor his critics have offered a convincing reason why we should not -- the influence of Richardson on Sade would seem rather exhaustive. In this chapter, I will claim that mutual feeling of sentimental affiliations form a basis for Sade's representation of selfhood in his libertine fictions, tendencies that have origins in Richardson's own interest in the fluidity of the sensible self, as described in Chapter Two.

In 1799, an illustrated edition of Sade's novel *La Nouvelle Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu* appeared in Paris, accompanied by a series of engravings that visually rendered its orgies in all their theatrical complexity.<sup>4</sup> One scene depicts a group of four simultaneous, identical orgies radiating outward from the center of the image (Figure 1).

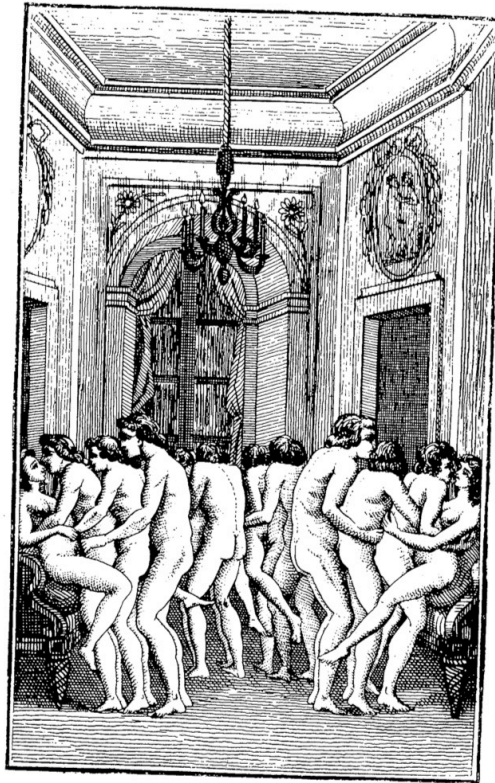


Figure 1.

Source: Gilles Néret, *Erotica: 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Century From Rembrandt to Fragonard* (Köln: Taschen Press, 2001).

In each orgy, three men are conjoined by an act of sodomy, with the third man penetrating a willing female who, facing in the opposite direction, casts her gaze back over the group. The orgy is thus a contained system, with a clear beginning and end, both aesthetically and physically coherent. There are elements of what some have deemed Sade's "mathematics" or "grammar" of pleasure here: the image depicts multiple, identical orgies as repetitive, accumulating pleasures, and the ratio of males to females condenses and intensifies male desire expressed through collective phallic penetration. However, the ostensibly more passive females on either side of the image arrest and then redirect our focus, as they stand in striking contrast to the male group: both physical body and aesthetic gaze simultaneously alter and lend coherence to the sexual act. The positioning of each woman's legs, which wrap themselves around all three men, indicates her receptiveness to all three lovers at once and *as one*. It is she who transforms the act from repetitive penetration to a more creative, imaginative, and experimental orgy: one woman receiving three men as one lover. And, finally, it is her gaze, cast forward over the act in its entirety, which aesthetically unifies and dramatizes the orgy as a complete and contained narrative, by giving force and meaning to the accumulated attention of the three men who watch her.

In his essay "Tout dire?: Sade and the Female Body," John Phillips details an interesting and suggestive contradiction in the infamous pornographer's novels. He observes that, while "[n]owhere else in world literature...is the female body so consistently abhorred," paradoxically, "[i]n spite of their aversion [to the female body]... Sade's libertines are repeatedly drawn to peer at it and dissect it, to torture, tear, eat, and defecate upon it, to turn it inside out, so that they can know exactly what it is..."

intimating that -- as the above image illustrates -- male desire can be shaped and directed by a more expansive female sexual energy.<sup>5</sup> In this chapter, I argue that, in its epistemological and aesthetic attention to the female body, libertine desire garners much of its force from the pursuit of a communal pleasure analogous to some of the eighteenth century's most influential discourses of the passions: those of sympathy, moral sentiment, and sensibility.<sup>6</sup> Like the prominent sentimental authors praised in his essay "Idées sur les romans," Sade shares a belief that the physiological experiences of an individual are shaped by outward forces (as in Condillac's account of the *homme-statue*) and also carry outward markers that can be read, interpreted, and indeed *felt* by others (as in Rousseau's notion of *pitié* and Adam Smith's theory of sympathy.)<sup>7</sup> Giving attention to these moments of connection and collectivity thus has profound implications for understanding the significance of communal pleasure to *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795), a text in which the powerfully transgressive possibilities of orgy are made explicit in both theory *and* practice. In this chapter, I contend that Sade adopts the paradoxical politics of looking epitomized by the literature of sensibility and its pleasures of mutual feeling into a perverse but earnest narrative of progressive sexual community.<sup>8</sup>

In *La Philosophie*, Sade restructures the typically sexed and polarized male gaze. Even as the libertine is driven by an insatiable desire to possess and control the female body, this body equally acts upon his gaze and draws the more rigid male body into the powerful tableaux of orgy, as Madame de Saint-Ange and Eugénie repeatedly illustrate. Thus, the male libertine is drawn into textual spaces where the individual affective response is absorbed within the larger affective community, and where seduction occurs on an aesthetic level as well as on a narrative level.<sup>9</sup> This movement

away from dimorphic couplings and towards a mutual and shared sense of pleasure complicates the rigid juxtaposition of a virile, cruel male hero against his passive female victim -- what has been characterized as a rather straightforward embrace of sexual complementarity in Sade's texts -- and instead posits a more mixed and indeterminate locus of sexuality in Sade's work.<sup>10</sup> Rather than oppositional or hierarchical, I contend that sexual subjectivity is often surprisingly communal in Sade.

For, if the female body is the subject of obsessive focus throughout Sade's *oeuvre*, the orgy is its central and distinctive mechanism. The female body behaves as the sentimental and emotional register of the text, accordingly sensitive, pliable, and affective -- particularly in *La Philosophie*, where the force and enthusiasm of Eugénie's sexual response measures the successful inculcation of libertine principles. In other words, while the orgy acts to cohere the group, it is the female body that invites, embodies and then signifies these moments of cohesion. Thus, while I am not the first to recognize the existence of orgiastic communities in Sade's text, I argue that these extend beyond the hermetic and self-enclosed fraternity of libertines described by Jane Gallop, or the exploitative counter-societies diagnosed by Marcel Hénaff.<sup>11</sup> Further, I challenge the enduring association of the Sadeian hero with the "coldness and cruelty" persuasively articulated by Gilles Deleuze and others, who read the libertine as a perverse and extreme formulation of the enlightenment individual: rational, but not empathetic, empirical but not ethical, methodical but not measured.<sup>12</sup> As this chapter will demonstrate, there is a competing narrative to Deleuze's assertion that solipsism and distance are the only originating source of power for the libertine. The Sadeian hero, I insist, *cannot* act alone: he is formed and empowered by the elaborate community of orgy that he both organizes

and populates. Thus, through the orgy, Sade privileges an even more insatiable need for community and connection, and by extension, the exquisite pleasures only made possible in the accumulative and shared sensations of an aroused group. Group sex is perhaps the only acceptable form of social cohesion in *La Philosophie*, as it replicates and strengthens the bonds of nature while simultaneously eschewing the emphatically *societal* preferences for monogamy, and -- Sade will argue, rather unconvincingly -- reproduction.

*La Philosophie* explicitly rejects the charges of solipsism and apathy. Its very form -- an aroused series of dialogues between three libertines and various others, coupled with the inclusion of a political pamphlet that promulgates an extreme and sadistic republicanism, "Français, encore un effort si vous voulez être républicains," -- indicates a serious attempt on Sade's part to bridge his radical politics with his communal aesthetic and to funnel both into a burgeoning (im-)moral philosophy.<sup>13</sup> In the dialogues of *La Philosophie*, Dolmancé must vie for textual space, sharing the boudoir with Saint-Ange and Eugénie, who speak unabashedly, openly and -- perhaps more importantly -- directly to the reader, without the synthesizing filter of external narration. Saint-Ange and Eugénie join with several other voices that populate the text and destabilize any claim Dolmancé might make to serving as the text's ontological or even epistemological center.<sup>14</sup> And while Dolmancé is often considered to dominate the boudoir by his initiating and ordering of the orgies, it is undoubtedly the two females who seek to visually enhance, to broaden, and to blur these initial predilections. While Sade clearly affords the (often singularly phallic) sexual body an enormous amount of power and privilege in *La Philosophie*, I maintain that he is equally interested in how the natural mechanisms that betray our common humanity -- our simultaneously universal and

particular bodies, desires, perversities -- indicate *the potential* for a radical political equality, even if such a state can only fleetingly be achieved.<sup>15</sup> The most powerful of the mechanisms is sexual desire: for Sade, an emphatically polymorphous energy that compels and energizes all people. The communal sympathies that Sade evinces in *La Philosophie* thus inform his radical revisiting of sensibility and, in particular, its emphasis on the shared mechanism of a core communal feeling.

There is, then, a perverse pleasure inherent in exhibiting and/or recognizing coded desire, and that pleasure is simultaneously self-oriented and social. And what the French tradition brings -- particularly through the looming figure of Denis Diderot -- is the productive and explicit conflation of instructive moral sentiment with heightened erotic pleasure. Indeed, as David Marshall notes, even the entry on *sympathie* in the *Encyclopédie* (written by Louis de Jaucourt) links sympathy with seduction, as “fellow feeling always has the potential to pass from the transport of compassion to the transports of eroticism (or at least love).”<sup>16</sup> While this parallel remains largely implicit in the novels of Richardson, for example, it is boldly stressed in titillating erotic texts like *La Religieuse* (c. 1780). This chapter, then, traces Sade’s contribution precisely along this correspondence between the public language of feeling and what seems to be an extreme version of it: the polymorphous and impossibly pliable female body that signifies and communicates pleasure, and her role in enabling the explicitly erotic “fellow feeling” of simultaneous group climax, achievable only through orgy.

### **Sadeian Sensibilities**

Despite Sade's self-professed literary lineage in "Idées sur les romans," he has largely remained absent from most serious discussions of the literature of feeling.<sup>17</sup> This is possibly a generic oversight. In Janet Todd's *Sensibility: An Introduction*, she calls sentimental work that which "reveals a belief in the appealing and aesthetic quality of virtue, displayed in a naughty world through a vague and potent distress." Though the sentimental novel is conceptually and formally similar to the novel of sensibility, it differs in that it does not "honour above all the capacity for refined feeling," an "innate sensitiveness or susceptibility, revealing itself in a variety of spontaneous activities such as crying, swooning, and kneeling."<sup>18</sup> I note this distinction because critics of Sade have, I believe, mistakenly cited his vituperation of virtue as evidence that he rejects or, at best, parodies the tradition of sensibility. It is the emphasis on "refined feeling," and not virtue, that separates and defines the British tradition of sensibility, and -- as I am suggesting in my study of Sade, in concordance with critics like Anne Vila -- opens up a new dimension in the French tradition. In particular, Sade incorporates and embraces the model of "refined feeling" in the context of a specifically sexual pleasure that might be called "refined fucking": fucking as the core of social community, and further, as the exhibition of both a refined taste and of an "innate sensitiveness or susceptibility" on the part of the libertine.

It is also worth recognizing that, while Sade certainly presents rather evident and immediate challenges to what generally constitutes sentimental fiction, a key element of these related genres applies to his writing. Both the novel of sentiment and also that of sensibility, Todd claims, strive to affect the reader in "reality" -- outside of the fictional world -- rather like how pornography aims to *arouse* the reader and the Gothic to



terrorize her.<sup>19</sup> Todd convincingly lays the groundwork for an implied parallel between the physiological arousal incited by a novel dedicated to sentiment and emotion -- the potential of moving a reader to tears, for example -- and the numerous other, more illicit ways in which readers might find themselves stirred. Indeed, reading Henry MacKenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771) is not wholly unlike reading Sade's *120 Days of Sodom* (1785): both are composed of brief, intensely-felt episodes that demand, rather insistently, a physiological response from the reader. Further, with the addition of each consecutive episode, that arousal is intensified and exponentially increased in both texts.

In a work that explicitly links Sade with the British tradition of sensibility, R.F. Brissendon details the ideological and aesthetic parallels between his writing and the sadistic propensities of novels by Samuel Richardson, Jane Austen, and others.<sup>20</sup> While Brissendon reveals authors like Austen to be "remarkably sadistic," however, he ignores the inverse possibility: that *Sade* is remarkably sentimental.<sup>21</sup> Sade rejects, according to Brissendon, the "sentimental image of man" precisely because of his refined ineffectuality, which "denie[s] not only the sexual elements *in his nature*, but also his *inherent* violence, aggressiveness, selfishness, and cruelty."<sup>22</sup> How one categorizes Sade generically -- as sentimental fiction, or not -- boils down to his seemingly incompatible notion of human "nature," a nature that is inherently "violen[t]," "aggressive" and "cruel." Initially this does seem quite different from sentimental "nature." John Mullan, who historicizes a "language of feeling" in the eighteenth century, quite clearly juxtaposes the "sociability" of sentiment against "political discourses of the eighteenth century" that "habitually identified passion with narrow interest and socially destructive fantasy." Writing of British sensibility, Mullan references Thomas Hobbes and Bernard

Mandeville, but such discourses also resonate in the writings of materialist *philosophes* with whom the solipsist Sade is frequently aligned, particularly La Mettrie and Baron d'Holbach.<sup>23</sup> It is only when, Mullan tells us, moral theorists like David Hume and Adam Smith advocate a loosening of sentiment from inwardly-directed passion towards an outwardly-directed sympathy that personal emotions become the latticework for broader societal interests.<sup>24</sup> And yet Sade, whom most readers doom as perpetually and irreconcilably self-interested, is not believed to theorize sociable or sympathetic passions in the period.

Yet even self-absorption is, paradoxically, revealed to be a shared phenomenon in *La Philosophie*. For example, in the first dialogue, where Saint-Ange instructs Eugénie, that “[u]ne jolie fille ne doit s’occuper que de *foutre* et jamais d’*engenderer*” [a pretty girl should concentrate only on fucking, and never on bearing children], this seems precisely the sort of boldfaced philosophical premise that indicts Sade as anti-communal and perversely self-serving in his ideology.<sup>25</sup> Here the social pleasures afforded by family and society are brutally rebuffed in favor of sexual pleasure and, ultimately, perversity: this will become, in a few short lines, a lengthy justification for the intrinsic superiority of anal sex, preferable because it is more pleasurable and non-procreative. And, indeed, Saint-Ange appears to revel in this fact as she continues, “Nous glisserons sur tout ce qui tient au plat mécanisme de la population, pour nous attacher principalement et uniquement aux voluptés libertines dont l’esprit n’est nullement peuplateur” [We will skip everything connected with the lowbrow mechanism of reproduction, and we will chiefly and uniquely align ourselves with the libertine delights, whose spirit never cares about breeding...] Yet it is precisely Saint-Ange’s pedagogical

posturing, here, that betrays her need for a broader community to shape and infuse such “delights.” In describing her aim to “align” herself and her pupil Eugénie with the common “spirit” of “libertine” pleasures, she legitimizes this proclivity by using a shared and thus communal philosophical justification, and is quick to correct Eugénie’s perception that this is, in fact, an abhorrently individual predilection. (Procreative sex is the “lowbrow” act, in Saint-Ange’s formulation.) In contrast, Saint-Ange describes the pleasures of anal sex as coveted and elite, a preference demonstrated by a shared and established parameter of taste: she promises Eugénie that “rien ne peut plus rendre les plaisirs que l’on goûte, et celui qu’on éprouve à l’introduction par-devant” [the pleasure enjoyed during the penetration of your ass is incontestably preferable to all the delights that can be gained by the penetration in front]. Dolmancé, she urges, “te convaincra, j’espère, à toute bonne, que, de tous les plaisirs de la jouissance, c’est le seul que tu doives préférer” [will hopefully convince you, my dear friend, that of all the pleasures of enjoyment, this pleasure is the only kind you should prefer].<sup>26</sup>

What Sade thus aims to demonstrate through the education of Eugénie is that sodomy is both a *cultivated* and an *innate* pleasure. To illustrate this, he uses the competing philosophical registers of nature and culture: he juxtaposes Dolmancé’s claim for anal sex as a natural pleasure against Saint-Ange’s position that it is advantageous because it is learned. Both positions, ultimately, conclude by claiming sodomy as the most desirable form of penetration. Sodomy is natural, Dolmancé will claim some pages later -- in a dialogue that reads rather comically to a contemporary reader but that is intended seriously -- because the anus is clearly ergonomically designed for penetration by a penis. It is cultivated, Saint-Ange surmises, because “nature” initially resists with

“douleur,” but “une fois vancue” [once vanquished], the sufferer is able to experience a full range of unique pleasures.<sup>27</sup> For Sade, sodomy is represented as simultaneously a universal and an urbane or exclusive form of sexual pleasure: it is an innate sensation refined into an increasingly exquisite form through the shapings of a shared sexual culture and community. Thus, while Eugénie is a model pupil, she is also marked by an innate propensity towards sexual pleasure and feeling.<sup>28</sup> In this respect, the sensations described by Saint-Ange and Dolmancé, and embodied in Eugénie, analogize sodomy to the social mechanisms that refine inward emotions into outward sympathy and taste: both of which, moral theorists like Hume and Smith claim, are natural feelings that can and should be cultivated.<sup>29</sup>

For even the most incisive readers of Sade, sensibility presents a kind of paradox: as Anne Vila notes, for his (generally male) “libertine philosophes, sensibility operates as a boundless energetic instrument for cultivating the erotic intellect,” while, for his hapless (and generally female) “victims,” “it is an inexorably fatalistic force that dooms them to the worst kinds of moral and physical suffering.”<sup>30</sup> Yet Madame de Saint-Ange, who is both secretly a “libertine philosophe” and publicly a compliant wife, offers a considerably more complex and nuanced account of erotic sensibility in *La Philosophie*. Saint-Ange is particularly forceful in representing genuine sexual pleasures as neither fully autonomous nor fully conditional, but as rather willing and mutual. Communal sex, Saint-Ange suggests, actually *prevents* subjugation and victimization by eradicating the restrictive and arbitrary political identities that monogamy enforces, thus empowering the subject in unexpected ways.<sup>31</sup> In advocating the “cultivation of the erotic intellect” as a strategy to obviate the otherwise inevitable “moral and physical suffering” necessitated

by the phallogentric model of sexual sovereignty, Saint-Ange recommends that Eugénie see her body, instead, as powerfully receptive and ingeniously pliable, circulating within a community of possible lovers. She cautions Eugénie against the too-rigid embrace of virtue, a sentiment that is self-serving and egoistic, and she advocates instead a woman's right to own the pleasures of her body *and* the "right way" to direct these pleasures: outward, into the broader social network, for the greater good.<sup>32</sup> She reiterates:

Les plaisirs reçus par l'estime, Eugénie, ne sont que des plaisirs moraux, uniquement convenables à certaines têtes; ceux de la *fouerie* plaisent à tous... Fouts, Eugénie, fouts donc, mon cher ange; ton corps est à toi, à toi, seule; il n'y a que toi seule au monde qui aies le droit d'en jouir et d'en faire jouir qui bon te semble.

[The pleasures of esteem, Eugénie, are nothing but spiritual delights, which are suitable purely for certain minds, while the pleasures of *fucking* please everyone... Fuck, Eugénie, fuck away, my dear angel! Your body belongs to you, to you alone. You are the only person in the world who has the right to enjoy your body and to let anyone you wish enjoy it.]<sup>33</sup>

For Saint-Ange, the body politically "belongs to you, to you alone" -- and Sade has long been extolled by feminist critics for his consistency in this respect, arguing later that "il ne peut donc être jamais donné...de droit légitime à un sexe de s'emparer exclusivement de l'autre" [no sex is granted the legitimate right to seize the other sex exclusively] -- but

the best way to enjoy the aesthetic or erotic body is “to let anyone you wish enjoy it.”<sup>34</sup> It is through this sharing of the sexual body that one moves beyond the “spiritual delights” afforded by the vain “pleasures of esteem” into the “pleasures of *fucking*,” superior and preferable because they transcend the pleasures of the individual body, the “certain mind[...],” and, by extension, “please everyone.” So, as Sade muses philosophically later in *La Philosophie*, “c’est pour le bonheur de tous, et non pour un bonheur égoïste et privilégié, que nous ont été données les femmes...” [it is for *universal happiness* and not for an egotistical and privileged happiness that we have been given women...] <sup>35</sup>

And yet it is evident that, despite her commitment to enabling and enjoying “universal happiness,” Saint-Ange is also fiercely dedicated to her belief in a woman’s right to control her own body and its unique pleasures. She is ruthless on the subject of familial laws governing daughters, finding it abhorrent that, “dans un siècle où l’étendue et les droits de l’homme viennent d’être approfondis avec tant de soin” [in a century where the rights of man have been so carefully widened and deepened], “les pouvoirs de ces familles” [parental powers] are viewed as anything but “absolument chimériques” [absolutely chimerical].<sup>36</sup> Saint-Ange advocates instead that daughters abandon their homes in their early teens and dedicate themselves to serving others sexually – not in marriage, but in the more democratic and charitable institution of whoring:

La destinée de la femme est d’être comme la chienne, comme la louve: elle doit appartenir à tous ceux qui veulent d’elle. C’est visiblement outrager la destination que la nature impose aux femmes, que de les enchaîner par le lien absurde d’un hymen solitaire....Fouts, en un mot,

fouts; c'est pour cela que tu es mise au monde; aucune borne à tes plaisirs que celle de tes forces ou de tes volontés; aucune exception de lieux, de temps et de personnes; toutes les heures, toutes les endroits, tous les hommes doivent servir à tes voluptés; la continence est une vertu impossible, don't la nature, violée dans ses droits, nous punit aussitôt par mille malheurs.

[A woman's fate is to be like a she-wolf, a bitch: she must belong to everyone who wants her. We are quite blatantly outraging the destiny that nature imposes on a woman if we absurdly fetter her to a solitary marriage...fuck!—in a word—fuck! That's why you were put on this earth! There is no barrier to pleasure outside of your own strength and will; no exception beyond place time and person. All hours, all areas, all men must serve your sensual delight; continence is an impossible virtue, which nature, violated in its rights, instantly punishes with a thousand miseries.]<sup>37</sup>

While the logic is troubling here, as this is easily read as a moment in which Sade conveniently aligns female sexual power with subservience to, and complicity with, male desire, it is important to note that Saint-Ange imagines whoring as a mutually beneficial vocation.<sup>38</sup> A whore gives and receives pleasure without limits -- a transcendental kind of pleasure otherwise restricted (in Sade's *oeuvre*) rather exclusively for *male* libertines: "all hours, all areas, all men must serve you" is the promise made to a woman who makes

the conscious choice to sacrifice her self-enclosed and sexed body to pleasure.<sup>39</sup> For, even as she “belong[s] to everyone who wants her,” she also exerts an extraordinary amount of power over “all men.” And she aligns herself with her magnetic sexual nature through “fuck[ing]”: it is her “fate,” her “destiny,” and her vocation, powerful and even portentous in the world of the boudoir, as for Saint-Ange, and also for Dolmancé, real power lies not in the ability to *compel* one to submit, but to *convince*.

Saint-Ange goes on to give an impassioned defense of the democratic and republican spirit of the whore:

On appelle de cette manière, ma toute belle, ces victimes publiques de la débauche des hommes, toujours prêtes à se livrer à leur temperament ou à leur intérêt; heureuses et respectables creatures, que l’opinion flétrit, mais que la volupté couronne, et qui, bien plus nécessaires à la société que les prudes, ont le courage de sacrifier, pour la servir, la consideration que cette société ose leur enlever injustement. Vivent celles que ce titre honore à leurs yeux! Voilà les femmes vraiment aimables, les seules véritablement philosophes!

[The word ‘whore,’ my lovely, refers to those freely available victims of male debauchery, women who are always ready to submit, either for their temperament or for their profit. They are happy and respectful creatures who are stigmatized by public opinion but crowned by pleasure. More crucial to society than any prudes, they have the courage to serve it and to



sacrifice the good reputation that society dares to deprive them of unjustly. Hurray for the women who feel honored by that title! They are truly lovable, the only real philosophers of the Enlightenment.]<sup>40</sup>

Here Saint-Ange quite clearly conflates the use-value of the whore with her willingness to “sacrifice” the artificial constraints of social mores to the service of the greater good, as she possesses “the courage to serve” society, and, what’s more, is even able to derive an extreme pleasure from doing so. Saint-Ange tells Eugénie that she is proud to be a whore because she acts in the service of society, unlike so-called virtuous women (who are ignited by “l’ambition,” “l’orgueil,” and “la froideur seule d’un temperament qui ne leur conseille rien” [ambition...pride...the coldness of a temperament that never counsels them]) and even God, an anti-communal figure “inutile” [useless] to the cooperative system that Sade envisions (“s’il est certain qu’à supposer que cet être inerte existât, ce serait assurément le plus ridicule de tous les êtres, puisqu’il n’aurait servi qu’un seul jour, et que depuis des millions de siècles il serait dans une inaction méprisable...” [if it is certain that -- assuming this inert creature exists -- it must definitely be the most ridiculous of all creatures, since it functioned for only one day, next tarrying in loathsome inaction for millions of centuries]).<sup>41</sup> The whore, then, is a more communal figure than is the creator of the universe because she is constantly circulating, in motion, serving the needs of a demanding society while God remains “inert,” “tarrying in loathsome inaction.” It is the uniquely collaborative spirit of the whore that renders women the “true philosophers of the Enlightenment,” as female sensibility is inherently republican: it is expansive, it is inclusive, it is in every way communal -- and finally, it is orgiastic.

### **“Beyond the Very Limits of Possibility”: Expansive, Radical Female Desire**

It is moments like Saint-Ange’s description of the whore -- moments in which feminine power is boldly claimed -- that the philosophy espoused by Sade’s female libertines resonates with a particular moment in late twentieth-century feminism, where eroticism, the embrace of sexual pleasure, and the possibilities of communal sexuality are called upon to shape and define the very notion of “womanhood.” Theorists like Audre Lorde celebrate the erotic as “the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, or history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.”<sup>42</sup> In the 1970s, Jane Gallop said that reading Sade made her a “liberated woman,” though she would later question both the appropriateness of that label and why *La Philosophie*, in particular, “spoke so powerfully to [her].”<sup>43</sup> Yet Gallop, too, sees a simultaneously productive and troubling complicity between the “sexual revolutions” of the late twentieth century and the “philosophical” premises of the “Enlightenment.”<sup>44</sup> And Simone de Beauvoir – who famously asked if we “must burn” him – sees in Sade the profoundly communal possibilities of sexual pleasure. She writes: “ce n’est ni comme auteur ni comme perversi sexuel que Sade s’impose à notre attention: c’est par la relation qu’il a créée entre ces deux aspects de lui-même. Les anomalies de Sade prennent leur valeur du moment où, au lieu de les subir comme une nature donnée, il élabore un immense système afin de les revendiquer...” [it is neither as author nor as sexual pervert that Sade compels our attention; it is by virtue of the relationship he created between these two aspects of himself. Sade’s aberrations begin to acquire value when, instead of enduring them as his fixed nature, he elaborates

an immense system in order to justify them].<sup>45</sup> Beauvoir insightfully recognizes, here, that Sade's perversities acquire "value" not as the compulsive demonstrations of a solipsistic "fixed nature," but as parts of an "immense," dynamic "system" that helps "justify them." Indeed, de Beauvoir intimates, Sade's sexual proclivities carry no force if they are only his peculiar aberrations; it is only by virtue of his "elaborat[ions]," his expansion outward into a dense philosophical "system," that these energies take real force and shape.

It is along the same lines that Gallop describes her work (in the 1980s) as a "feminist enterprise," although she aims to situate it within an "antihumanist" criticism confluent with the poststructuralist, posthumanist perspective that has informed the work of this dissertation. Gallop writes: "As Sade stresses the sexual underpinnings of the philosophical and the political, as Sade violates certain identities, so our reading, a Sadian antihumanism, becomes necessarily a feminist disturbance of the distinction between masculine/feminine and the correlative privilege of the male, ideal sphere."<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Kathy Acker locates in Sade's texts a surprising complicity with the destabilizing subjectivity of postmodern feminist aesthetics, and, by extension, a dismantling of the male gaze in favor of a more splintered -- and according to Acker, nominally feminine -- view. Acker traces this tendency in Sade's writing to his incarcerated vantage point: the sensual and visual deprivation of his jail cell, she contends, aligns him -- however inimically -- with precisely the kind of perspective his female victims inhabit.<sup>47</sup> The violence of his representations is incidental, according to Acker, because focusing too heavily on the hollow representations of sexual violence misses what Sade truly offers to a discerning reader (which Acker certainly was): the daunting, and yet dazzling,

annihilation of phallogentric visuality. Acker quite emphatically rejects the claim of solipsism, arguing that the gaze, in Sade, is not simply “that sight whose visual correspondent is the mirror,” a mirror in which “one only sees oneself,” but that Sade, in fact, “shatter[s] mirror after mirror,” to show that “behind every mirror st[ands] another mirror,” and -- finally -- that “behind all mirrors, nothingness sits.” His perpetual and compulsive splintering of the truncated gaze reveals the (postmodern) truth of human identity: Acker concludes, “Sade wrote in order to seduce us, by means of his labyrinth of mirrors, into nothingness.”<sup>48</sup>

Acker is very consciously invoking and confronting a particular kind of feminist assumption about visuality and the aesthetic. The metaphor of the gaze, which so preoccupied anti-pornography feminists, is -- according to Acker -- defused, splintered, and deflected in precisely the kind of pornography that these activists railed against. If the masculine gaze only reflects itself in a “mirror,” this act of gazing is narcissistic and reflective, and thus not active or penetrative. But Sade does not simply hold up a “mirror,” Acker argues, to the social world: what he provides instead is a formidable act of conflation, aligning the perspective of the female object with the powerful and authorized position of the male subject. What Acker diagnoses as the interminable “labyrinth” of mirrors in Sade, or what Beauvoir characterizes as a “system,” I contend, helps to illustrate the movement towards the myriad and the communal rather than the solipsistic and the solitary in Sade’s work, and further, to assert this multiplicity as contingent to the female body and to female sexuality, in particular. And so it is Saint-Ange, and *not* Dolmancé, who in *La Philosophie* describes and circumscribes the space

of the boudoir: a space of infinite possibility and variety. The ingénue asks, “why all these mirrors?” and Saint-Ange replies

C’est pour que, répétant les attitudes en mille sens divers, elles multiplient à l’infini les memes jouissances aux yeux de ceux qui les goûtent sur cette ottomane. Aucune des parties de l’un ou l’autre corps ne peut être caché par ce moyen: il faut que tout soit en vue; ce sont autant de groupes rassemblés autour de ceux que l’amour enchaîne, autant d’imitateurs de leurs plaisirs, autant de tableaux délicieux, dont leur lubricité s’enivre et qui servent bientôt à la compléter elle-même.

[By reflecting the positions in a thousand different images, the mirrors infinitely multiply the same delights in the eyes of the people enjoying them on this ottoman. That way, no part of either body can be concealed: everything must be exposed. And there are as many groups surrounding the people entangled in love, as many imitators of their pleasures, as many delightful tableaux whose lechery is intoxicating, and which can soon serve to crown our efforts.]<sup>49</sup>

Expanding from the sentimental intimacy of two lovers “entangled” in sexual embrace, Saint-Ange exponentially increases this view so that the lovers can “infinitely multiply” these initial “delights.” They are visually struck by the accumulative sensations of “the many imitators of their pleasures,” a community of lovers who are also, intriguingly,

themselves. The “delightful tableaux,” and its “intoxicating” “lechery,” transforms into a vast erotic landscape populated by an orgy of lovers, while -- in reality -- it comprises only two. This ability to expand and explode the self-contained intimacy of one insular couple into an infinitude of “many” pleasures -- pleasures that expose “everything” -- characterizes not only the polymorphous desires of the libertine Saint-Ange, but the nominally feminine space of the boudoir itself.<sup>50</sup>

In depicting the boudoir as suspended between two aesthetic extremes -- infinite variety and yet, synthesizing unity -- Saint-Ange garners the inherent tension of the eighteenth-century dramatic tableau. The tableau, then, conflates visual with textual representation and positions the reader to witness what the text *shows*. Thus inherent in the complex aesthetics governing beholder and tableau is the tension between seduction and resistance. In his book *L'esthétique du tableau dans le théâtre du XVIIIe siècle*, Pierre Frantz describes the *tableau* as a “dialogic of sensation”: “Le tableau condense l’émotion et rayonne d’énergie simultanément... Le tableau participe d’une sorte de dialogique de la sensation” [The tableau simultaneously condenses emotion and releases energy... The tableau participates in a dialogic of sensation.]<sup>51</sup> Jay Caplan describes this tension between flux and fixity using erotic language: “...the tableau...is a sort of fetishistic snapshot in which the transitoriness of the real world is magically transformed into an ideal fixity.”<sup>52</sup> However, it is Tili Boon Cuillé’s characterization of the tableau as dynamic, an “emotional plenitude,” as opposed to an “ideal fixity,” that most resembles the unconstrained and unpredictable nature of the Sadeian tableau.<sup>53</sup> Sade’s use of the tableau as a governing form for representing orgiastic pleasure allows him to filter the particularities of individual sexual response within the abstracted, transcendent “ideal

fixity” perpetuated by the moment of communal orgasm. The tableau, then, casts the relationship between individual and communal pleasure within a powerful aesthetic frame.

The tension that Michael Fried identifies between absorption and distraction thus corresponds to this chapter’s interest in the relationship between individual and communal sexual desire. Indeed, the formulation of “eliciting” and “resisting” drives helps us to recognize the centrality of seemingly distracted actors to the narrative coherence of the sexual tableau, even as it disrupts the narrative order.<sup>54</sup>

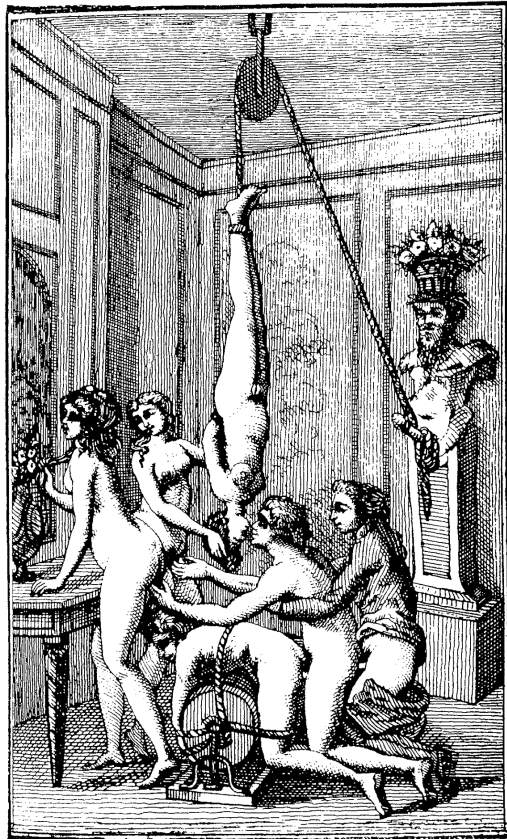


Figure 2.

Source: Gilles Néret, *Erotica: 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Century From Rembrandt to Fragonard* (Köln: Taschen Press, 2001)

In this engraving from *La Nouvelle Justine*, a half-dressed man sodomizes another, who sodomizes yet another figure strapped to a wheel. The second actor is, physically, the orgy's center: he penetrates the bound figure, he draws the standing women opposite into the collective act by fondling them, and finally, he kisses the bound woman hanging upside-down from the pulley. He is the one figure in direct physical contact with every other actor in the orgy, and thus he acts as its cohering mechanism. And yet, arguably, it is the women who -- despite occupying somewhat more marginal positions in the tableau -- aesthetically expand and proliferate the scene. While the bound woman, for example, faces in the opposite direction from the more cohesive, central group, two elements of her body provide focal emphasis: her gaze redirects the viewer, again, to the act of sodomy, and her straight legs form a kind of point, giving the orgy a triangular shape and emphasizing the linear connection between the subjects on the floor. Finally, the woman at the mirror watches the action unfold, and her vantage point serves to confirm the cohesiveness and insularity of the orgy. As she looks in the mirror, seemingly self-absorbed and distracted, she sees both herself as autonomous subject *and* the communal sex act in its entirety, with herself as its end point. She thus houses the tension between the individual and the group that the tableau itself questions and interrogates.

While the female body has perhaps been historically overlooked as a force defining and shaping the Sadeian aesthetic, the orgy -- usually made up of mostly female participants, or, at least, a higher ratio of female subjects to male -- is a governing and central image in Sade's writing. The orgy is one important instance in which the female body -- its mutability, its transferability, and its radical openness -- becomes a mechanism for exponentially increasing and intensifying pleasure, and the male director must submit



to be a participant, must offer pleasure to others even as he enjoys it himself. My understanding of how the orgy operates in a text like *La Philosophie* thus pushes against the historically phallogocentric conception of the orgy as advanced by George Bataille -- an “organized explosion” where “contagious actions” between men harmonize into a carnivalesque community of sexual violence -- in favor of the messier and less-constraining definition of orgy as presented by feminist critic Lucienne Frappier-Mazur: “the presentation of a collective act focusing on excess – be it of sex, of food, or of language – and on confusion: mingling of bodies, hybrid foods (such as fish and fowl), blurring of the line between natural and artificial décor.”<sup>55</sup> Frappier-Mazur’s depiction of orgy as “excess[ive]” and as “confus[ed]” emphasizes that the orgy is not necessarily the depiction of a condensed and intensified male pleasure, but in fact the comingling pleasures of both female and male participants, and -- so defined in the Sadeian universe -- nominally a feminine act.

Frappier-Mazur’s rather visceral understanding of the orgy as a tangible and sensual phenomenon underscores the ontological materialism that Sade finds both philosophically and aesthetically compelling. While Sade’s understanding of sexuality is deeply materialist, it is also progressively polymorphous. In the opening scene, Sade introduces a crucial distinction between women and men in an imaginatively empowering revision of the dimorphic or complementarian model of sexual identity. Saint-Ange describes herself as an “animal amphibie,” [an amphibious creature], saying, “j’aime tout, je m’amuse de tout, je veux réunir tous les genres” [I love everything, I enjoy everything, I want to try all kinds of pleasure]. By contrast, Dolmancé is described as “singulier” [that singular man], a “sodomite par principe” [sodomite by principle], a man who “ne

cède même au nôtre [sexe] que sous la clause spéciale de lui livrer les attraits chéris dont il est accoutumé” [yields to our sex purely on condition that it will supply him with the treasured charms that he is accustomed to] -- in short, a gourmet’s preference for sodomy over vaginal sex.<sup>56</sup> Dolmancé’s preference for anal sex and his privileging of the phallus will be challenged throughout the text, for even as Dolmancé structures a particularly seditious tableau to teach Eugénie about sodomy, it is Saint-Ange that coheres and centers the orgy, as she sodomizes her brother with a dildo while Dolmancé --- somewhat against his preferences -- sodomizes her. It is in this moment that Dolmancé calls the group a “chapelet formé” [a rosary], suggesting that even in this proliferation of sexual acts, a chain or collective pleasure emerges: the individual sexual pleasures are subsumed by the larger, collective act of sodomy that incorporates all five individual bodies into one mass body. Dolmancé, far from behaving as the tyrant of the boudoir, begs when he is fully aroused, “ne pensons plus qu’à décharger maintenant” [Now we want to think only of coming!]. His gratification thus depends on maintaining and participating in this heightened collective act. As the arousal mounts, the Chevalier begins to ejaculate -- Dolmancé attempts to rein him in, begging “Un peu d’ensemble, mes amis...et nous partirons tous à la fois” [A little togetherness, my friends...and we can all come simultaneously], exhibiting his reliance upon the group.<sup>57</sup> It is thus Saint-Ange who, cohering the group, makes the simultaneous climax possible: *not* Dolmancé, who is marginalized by his predilection. Indeed, here Sade’s understanding of orgasm as simultaneously transcendent and deeply vitalist aligns nicely with his understanding of death as an inherently polymorphous state: “ce que nous appelons la fin de l’animal qui a vie,” he writes, “ne sera plus ne fin réelle, mais une simple transmutation, don’t est la

base le mouvement perpétuel, véritable essence de la matière et que tous les philosophes modernes admettent comme une des ses premières lois. La mort, d'après ces principes irréfutables, n'est donc plus un changement de forme, qu'un passage imperceptible d'une existence à un autre..."[What we call the end of an animal's life will no longer be an actual end, it will be a simple transmutation based on perpetual motion, which is the true essence of matter, and which all modern philosophers accept as one of the supreme laws of matter. Hence, death, according to these irrefutable principles, is nothing but a change of form, an imperceptible passage from one existence to another...] <sup>58</sup>

Indeed, Dolmancé is often depicted in the text as profoundly limited by both his focused and highly-particular sexual proclivity -- sodomy, preferably homosexual -- and, by extension, the limits of his physical body, which is not capable of feeling or expressing pleasure in the same way as the more "amphibious" Saint-Ange. When Eugénie begs Saint-Ange and Dolmancé to supply her with details of the "écarts incroyables" [incredible deviations] they have experienced as libertines, it is Saint-Ange -- and not Dolmancé -- whose excessive and detailed lecheries titillate her. Dolmancé, by contrast, elides the question entirely, instead pressing her for a more immediate satisfaction: "Belle Eugénie, j'aimerais cent fois mieux vous voir éprouver tout ce que je voudrais faire, que de vous raconter ce que j'ai fait" [Beautiful Eugénie, I'd rather have you experience a hundred times over what I'd like to do to you than tell you what I've already done]. Here, Dolmancé equates pleasure with the repetitive and accumulative "experience" of sodomy. For Eugénie, the wholly undefinable and pleasurably various libertinage Saint-Ange hints at is vastly preferable. Even as Saint-Ange refuses to supply the full details, Eugénie presses her impatiently to "go further." When she responds,

coyly, “Cela se peut-il?” [Can one go any further?] Eugénie is sexually aroused, and cries out “Yes, yes, yes!,” picturing all the ways in which Saint-Ange might have experienced pleasure, with Eugénie supplying her own lascivious and sundry imagery, consoling herself that “nos sensations morales les plus délicieuses nous venaient de l’imagination” [the most delightful spiritual sensations derive from the imagination], which is infinitely various in its possibilities.<sup>59</sup>

Desire is, then, preferably various and flexible, and it is with this notion in mind that Dolmancé can be read as profoundly limited, and thus not the inventive master of cruelty that he is usually considered: the “ultimate authority in the *boudoir*.”<sup>60</sup> Indeed, even as he instructs Eugénie that “toutes sont dans la nature” [all desires can be found in nature], and thus “[a]ucune ne peut se qualifier ainsi [extraordinaire]” “none can be termed outlandish,” Dolmancé himself experiences pleasure only in the act of sodomy. Still, he recognizes that “[Nature] s’est plu, en créant les hommes, à différencier leurs goûts comme leur figures, et nous ne devons pas plus nous étonner de la diversité qu’elle a mise dans nos traits que de celle qu’elle a placée dans nos affections” [When nature created human beings, it delighted in differentiating their sexual leanings as much as their faces; and we should no more be astonished by the diversity of our features than by the diversity that nature has placed in our affections.]<sup>61</sup> Yet his affections are always the same; even in a particularly inventive tableau, Dolmancé constructs only a limited and restricted role for himself. After he gives “quelques courses dans le cul de cette enfant” [several thrusts in this child’s ass], Dolmancé instructs promisingly, “nous varierons le tableau” [we’ll vary the tableau]. But it is ultimately only Saint-Ange and Eugénie who, following in his direction, will assume rather complicated and intricate positions:

“Eugénie, au-dessus de vous, votre tête entre ses jambes, m’offrira son clitoris à sucer,” [Eugénie, on top of you with your head between her legs, will present me with her clitoris to lick], and she and Saint-Ange share a cooperative embrace, “elle pourra vous le rendre” [giv[ing]...tit for tat] and “baiserez l’une et l’autre” [kiss[ing] each other]. Dolmancé’s role in the tableau, besides his (purely pedagogical) oral stimulation of Eugénie, is much more formulaic: “Je vous enculerai, madame” [I’ll...fuck you up the ass, Madame]; “Je me replacerai ensuite dans son anus” [Next I’ll plumb her anus again]; “Vous me présenterez votre cul...” [You’ll hand over your ass]; “Je sucrai le trou de votre cul” [I’ll suck your asshole...] <sup>62</sup> While Eugénie and Saint-Ange circulate, move dynamically, and occupy elaborate roles in the tableau, Dolmancé is locked into compulsive repetition. Accordingly, Saint-Ange playfully but bluntly implies Dolmancé’s sexual limitations at the close of the tableau: “Voilà les homes, ma chère, à peine nous regardent-ils quand leurs désirs sont satisfaits...” [That’s a man for you, my dear! No sooner does he glance at you than his desires are satisfied!] <sup>63</sup>

But even as the male body is limited by its predilections, the inherent possibilities of the more pliable female body draws him out of these compulsive, repetitive proclivities. For example, Dolmancé draws an aesthetic comparison between the “asses” of Eugénie and Saint-Ange, admiring them “l’un près de l’autre” [side by side]. But the two women do more than simply offer him the cumulative, repetitive pleasure of two asses: they “enchain[ent]” [entangle] themselves into a “spectacle enchanteur de tant de beautés” [magical spectacle of so much beauty] two bodies wrapped together in “enchant[ment]” for Dolmancé to “idolize.” <sup>64</sup> Clearly there is something *more* that happens when these sexual objects combine and commingle before his very eyes. Later,

Dolmancé takes immense pleasure in “unit[ing]” Saint-Ange with her brother, the Chevalier, in “heavenly incest,” in a pleasure that is intensified because it involves an illegal and immoral commingling between brother and sister and thus the sordid collapse of difference and differentiation.<sup>65</sup> (In his political pamphlet, Sade will describes incest as highly republican because it “étend les liens des familles et rend par consequent plus actif l’amour des citoyens pour la patrie” [loosens family ties and therefore strengthens the citizen’s love for their country...].)<sup>66</sup> He tells the couple “ce sont mes doigts qui doivent vous lier” [let my fingers tie you together], invoking an image of weaving and of connection, and ultimately it is Saint-Ange who finds herself in a sublime moment of collective pleasure. She cries:

Ah! mes amis, me voilà donc foutue des deux côtés....Sacredieu! quel divin plaisir!... Non, il n’en est pas de semblable au monde... Ah! foutre! que je plains la femme qui ne l’a pas goûté! ... et toi, Eugénie, contemple-moi; viens me regarder dan le vice; viens apprendre, à le goûter avec transport, à le savourer avec délices... Vois, mon amour, vois tout ce que je fais à la fois: scandale, seduction, mauvauis exemple, inceste, adultère, sodomie!

[My friends! I’m getting fucked coming and going!...Damn it! What divine pleasure!...No, there’s nothing like it in the whole world!...Ah, fucking! How I pity the woman who hasn’t tasted it... And you, Eugénie! Gaze at me! Watch me in my vices, learn by my example, savor my vices,

relish them, delight in them. Look, my love! See everything I perpetrate at once: scandal, seduction, bad role model, incest, adultery, sodomy!]<sup>67</sup>

Though Dolmancé has earlier claimed his “right” to “direct the scene,” here Saint-Ange radiates authority because she *is* the orgy’s veritable center -- as was the male actor in Figure 2, above -- “getting fucked coming and going.” Saint-Ange seizes this moment to empower Eugénie through her gaze: to encourage her to see the way in which Saint-Ange is able to embody “everything...at once,” all her “vices” simultaneously. And though Dolmancé initially intended for the lesson of the tableaux to be singularly phallic -- the aim is ostensibly for Eugénie to witness sodomy -- as the orgy continues, the focus is redirected to Eugénie’s shifting pleasures and transformative sexual prowess.

Dolmancé gasps, after Eugénie completes a particularly salacious *tableau* by penetrating him with a dildo, “Cette charmante fille m’a foutu comme un dieu” [This enchanting girl has fucked me like a god!] Eugénie responds, “En vérité j’y ai ressenti du plaisir” [I really *felt* your pleasure] -- ever the text’s emotional register -- and Dolmancé concludes, “Tous les excès en donnent quand on est libertine, et ce qu’une femme a de mieux à faire, est de les multiplier au-delà même du possible” [If you’re a libertine, every excess triggers pleasure, and the best thing a woman can do is to multiply those excesses beyond the very limits of possibility].<sup>68</sup> In other words, Eugénie has so powerfully and “enchantingly” fucked Dolmancé because she has become sensitive to his “pleasure,” *feeling* his arousal and complying with his proclivity. Now she, like Saint-Ange, is ready to experience “every excess,” and, further, “to multiply those excesses beyond the very limits of possibility.”

This image of Eugénie, fired with sexual lust, lording over the libertine, triumphantly gripping the dildo and reveling in how she “fe[els]” every sensation of Dolmancé’s pleasure as she “fuck[s] [him] like a god,” brilliantly demonstrates that the pleasures and powers of sensibility can also be, as Vila describes, “boundlessly energetic” for the female victim. What this moment powerfully illustrates is that the narrative of sexual education throughout *La Philosophie* is not exclusively the story of a seasoned libertine corrupting a naïve ingénue. It is also, quite surprisingly, the story of how the unbridled, unlimited, and indeed unexpected desires of the ingénue can expand and encircle the otherwise compulsive behaviors of the libertine. Eugénie’s ravenous sexuality opens up new sexual possibilities for Dolmancé, possibilities that extend beyond the boudoir, and that “multiply...beyond the very limits” of the possible.

### **Conclusion: The Feminine Community of Orgy**

Throughout *La Philosophie*, as I have shown, there are many such instances that claim female sexual power as masterful and superior to male desire, thus perhaps one of the strongest communities in the Sadeian text is, rather surprisingly, that which is formed between and among women. Saint-Ange advises Eugénie to “se procurer une bonne amie qui, libre et dans le monde, puisse lui en faire secrètement goûter les plaisirs” [have a good friend, a woman, who, untrammled and in society, can help [her] to secretly taste those worldly pleasures], and elsewhere in another of Sade’s novels, the rakish and vile Juliette comforts and protects her abused, virtuous sister.<sup>69</sup> Such a mentor can equip her mentee with the resources to “jette alors de la poudre aux yeux de tout ce qui l’entoure” [throw dust in the eyes of all the people around her]: the mentor can show, in other



words, how to “submit” disingenuously to those who would prevent her sexual freedoms in order to preserve her reputation for the satisfaction of later intrigues. Even a marriage or sexual arrangement that initially “displeases,” and “to which she submits purely out of self-interest,” has the ability to “launch[... her] in society,” if guided by the more experienced hands of another female libertine. From such a woman, even the most innocent of girls can learn to “rejette[r] et méprise[r] opiniâtrement tout ce qui ne tend qu’à la renchaîner, tout ce qui ne vise point, en un mot, à la livrer au sein de impudicité [stubbornly reject and despise everything that tends only to clap her in irons again—in short, everything that doesn’t contribute to keeping her in the lap of lewdness...]”<sup>70</sup> Sade goes further still in his philosophical pamphlet: he advocates the establishment of pleasure-houses for women, where “où leurs caprices et les besoins de leur temperament, bien autrement ardent que le nôtre, puissant de meme se satisfaire avec tous les sexes” [they can satisfy themselves with all sexes, gratify their whims and the needs of their temperaments, which, indeed, are far more ardent than our own].<sup>71</sup>

What Saint-Ange clearly advocates and promotes in her pedagogical model is close, communicative and cooperative relations among women, and her model nicely aligns itself with Sade’s earnest defense of radical republicanism and perpetual revolution in “Français, encore un effort.” Indeed, in Sade’s elegant and often emphatic assertion of a woman’s right to govern her own body, to own and enjoy her sexual preferences and pleasures -- not to mention his support of other rights, including matrilineal claims to children as property --he outlines a vexed but consistent sexual politics. Sade thus offers an unexpectedly inclusive aesthetic and political model of community through libertinism, a model that reaches its fullest and most powerful expression in the orgy. For

the orgy demonstrates, in the extreme, the possibilities for cohesion even within the kind of splintered subjectivity afforded the Sadeian heroine, and -- rather crucially -- shows how only this form of self-conscious passivity, in its radical openness and flexibility, has the power to ignite the cumulative, explosive pleasures of group climax.

## **Conclusion**

### **The Relational Self and the 'Postmodern' Eighteenth Century**

The readings in this project have formed their own strange, and motley, community: it is unusual, to say the least, to begin a dissertation with Thomson and end with Sade. In the next few pages I will try to offer some sense of how this came to pass. In short, I will offer some ways of conceiving of this community of literary selves as a connected group, rather than as a series of isolated examples. The ties that bind, for example, a Thomson to a Sade, demand not only a recasting of our typical literary-historical stories, but also a questioning of both the individual as a privileged category of analysis, and of the eighteenth century more generally as a “modernizing moment.”

For James Thomson, nature is a network of fortuitous, unpredictable collisions, from which the attentive self is able to glean meaningful insight into his or her own feeling being. While there are undoubtedly moments in which Thomson can be said to engage with a more unified and sublimely abstract concept of nature -- Nature with a capital “N,” so to speak -- this kind of nature overwhelms him, stupefies him, awes him: it occasions the poet-speaker’s disconnection from, and frustration with, a world that offers him no solace. It is, rather, the moments in which Thomson engages closely with an exquisitely-wrought natural detail -- an approaching thunderstorm, the maddening lust of a bull, the elegant courtship of the birds -- that deepen his sense of being as relational and as profoundly connected to the natural world. As I have argued in Chapter One, the personal relationships that Thomson wound in and through his poetry reciprocally affect

and are affected by the inherently relational models everywhere present in nature. It is not, then, how the Florist organizes and controls the flowers that moves us, but in how the flowers respond to the Florist; not in how Spring comes to dominate the landscape, but in how the gasping season struggles free from winter while secretly enfolding the anticipated harvest; not in how the husbandmen till the land, but in how the soil, oxen, seed, and glebe all collaborate to encourage that first vernal shoot. There is, in Thomson, an inherent respect for process, for transition, and for the uncertainty of the collective associations joining humans with non-humans. We are everywhere, in *Spring*, conscious of how erratic and yet thrilling these moments of collision can be.

These uncertain and yet orgiastic associations also mark the kinds of relationships that structure the libertine novels of D.A.F., Marquis de Sade, who also, rather crucially, bases his notion of the relational self in an unpredictable and uncertain nature -- albeit of a substantially less benevolent kind than does Thomson. For Sade, the messy and highly unstable orgy is an intensely associative experience, one that subsumes the individual within its powerful, communal pleasures. It is also transformative, edifying, both for the ingénue and for the libertine: Dolmancé and Saint-Ange, as I have shown, confirm themselves as exceptional libertines only by their successful negotiation of orgiastic desire and by how others -- specifically Eugénie -- adopt and propagate their principles. Saint-Ange, in particular, models this kind of expansive association more obviously: in how she physically centers the orgy, or in how she collects and accumulates pleasure from multiple lovers. Both Saint-Ange and Eugénie expand the possibilities of libertine desire while actively in pursuit of their own self-interested pleasure, a model that not only

reflects the poetic aspirations of Thomson's poet-speaker, but also resonates with the libertine pursuit of "promiscuous Diversions" in novels like *Betsy Thoughtless*.

For Haywood, however -- unlike these more utopian visions of Thomson and Sade -- such unlimited pleasures are constantly in danger of becoming restricted, and this is also the case in Richardson's *Clarissa*. What manifests in these accounts of more domestic relations are the pleasures that can be incurred even when the subjects themselves are physically, socially, or even sexually restricted. Domestic fiction manifests boundaries and requires its heroines to patently observe them; however, as I have shown here, such acts of resistance and even of compliance serve to confirm, rather than to challenge, a relational sense of subjectivity in Richardson and Haywood. What *Clarissa* and *Betsy* best demonstrate, then, is the ways in which relational selves both oppose and are complicit with broader networks of power, how they draw upon the hierarchical and patriarchal institutions that demand their compliance to form their own exemplary, resistant selves. As I have suggested repeatedly in this dissertation, this dialectic not only demonstrates the unexpected complicity of the "spotless" *Clarissa* with her amatory counterparts, but also proves influential for Sade's own vision of persecuted (and "rewarded") virtue.

All four of the relational selves I describe here in some way or another rely upon the eighteenth-century understanding of sensibility as formative for moral, sentimental, and social selfhood. Indeed, sensibility is, at its core, a relational phenomenon. These texts characteristically dramatize an individual's emotional, physiological, and social development alongside his or her broader networks of nature and family, suitors and lovers, friends and villains.<sup>1</sup> The literature of sensibility rather exclusively concerns itself

with the mechanisms, problems, and limitations of sociability: texts center on issues of political and contractual responsibility, of fellow feeling, moral sentiment and sympathy.<sup>2</sup> But in addition to these intradiegetic concerns, eighteenth-century readers were themselves implicated in the extradiegetic communities of sentimental texts -- another important dimension of sensibility's relations.<sup>3</sup> Authors like Haywood, Richardson, and Sade demanded that readers join with protagonists in search of emotional refinement and experience, and -- while Thomson did not explicitly engage the reader in his poetry itself -- *The Seasons* were also looked upon as a popular tool of moral and sentimental edification.<sup>4</sup> Though we cannot know how actual readers experienced these texts, we know that they were, at least, *invited* to develop a moral compass, cultivate sentimental ethics, or even sharpen repressed libertine sensibilities through the proper consumption of stories of feeling.<sup>5</sup> Thus the imagined community joining reader and sentimental text aimed at a highly specialized function: to refine the reader's moral *ethos* (or, in the case of Sade, *anti-ethos*). By developing sympathetic and instructive experience suited to a broad range of readers, the literature of sensibility deploys the power of communal feeling as a way of developing the individual reader into an *exceptionally* feeling and sympathetic being, alongside and through the protagonist. In every text that I study here, then, as well as in the literature of sensibility more broadly, communal experiences *are* what enable a highly particularized and developed sense of self, both within the text and -- it is suggested -- even beyond it.<sup>6</sup>

The radically relational selves that I have described in this dissertation also anticipate, in exciting ways, the uncertain, fragmented subjectivities that have characterized the postmodern, posthumanist condition. In *Questioning History: The*

*Postmodern Turn to the Eighteenth Century*, Greg Clingham argues that “[t]he eighteenth century...needs to be seen as a site for some of postmodernism’s crucial insights and ideals;” for Clingham, who is primarily interested in “the structure of historical consciousness,” those insights center on “the place of the fictive in the production of the real, the true, and the historical.”<sup>7</sup> Insightfully, he argues that the inherent belief that the “postmodern” approach “assum[es] that current practice *exceeds* that of the Enlightenment in sophistication and historical grasp,” a premise that reveals, he maintains, how “[t]he ‘postmodern’ intervention thereby replicates an *unhistorical* ‘othering’ of the past of the kind that it deplores in the Enlightenment itself” (14). This compelling reading unmasks our niggling and yet unconfirmed suspicions that, to use other examples not fully explored in this project, Tristram Shandy’s consciously inchoate self-representations or Fantomina’s performative, unfixable identities are suggestive but indeed *less* sophisticated than more contemporary experimentations with the relational self. And, indeed, Clingham’s essay inspires a reconsideration of postmodernism as a “phenomenon” rather than as a bounded historical period: for, if the so-called “postmodern” individual is a series of attributes, or an ontological state, rather than a historical entity, it is quite possible and promising to suggest that eighteenth-century writers conceived of these attributes, too.

This dissertation has shown how a radically relational subjectivity is foundational to eighteenth-century representations of the literary self across borders, genres, and modes. What the texts in my project all suggest, collectively, is that eighteenth-century *literary* selves were quite more complicated and porous than the oppositional models of sexual complementarity, or the liberal narratives of bourgeois individualism, would allow

us to believe. Perhaps the most significant and lasting of these narratives is the rise of the novel, which has been rather inextricably linked to the rise of the individual. This is, I would suggest, at least partially because the tensions between individual and collective have their analogy on the critical level as well, in the competing instincts to see the novel as a phenomenon unique and foundational to the British eighteenth century and in the desire to broaden and deepen our understanding of so-called “novelistic” discourse in the long eighteenth and beyond. In other words, we have privileged the individual because we have argued that *the novel* is individual; we have dismissed a more communal sense of “novelty” or of literary innovation because we see it as detracting from the uniqueness of the novel. My dissertation has sought to expand our understanding of eighteenth-century subjectivity to include the alterities of georgic poetry and the polymorphous dynamism of the *roman libertin*. While the texts in this dissertation all develop in wildly different contexts -- and I hope I have been attentive to those contexts throughout -- they share important and lasting perspectives on what it means to be a subject in an uncertain world: a subject who is not bounded, self-enclosed, or sealed off, but in fact radically open to all that the teeming and dynamic world has to offer. While historically “premodern,” this subject’s simultaneous aspirations to “modernity” – despite her perpetual questioning and revisiting of what that “modernity” might look like – makes her perhaps more of a postmodern subject than we might otherwise have expected.

Thinking of selfhood in relational terms is a commonplace in the Internet age: Facebook profiles, Twitter accounts, and the efflorescence of social media all attest to a twenty-first century understanding of subjectivity as a composite, networked phenomenon. We define the individual now by her accumulation of friends, her



extensive networks, and her collections of things. While I am not claiming that the eighteenth century possessed similar or even analogous technologies for self-display and social networking, I do argue that the literature I've studied here exhibits a clear awareness of the self as a complex, dynamic phenomenon that draws from his or her relations, the various communities of which s/he is part. Libertines defined themselves and their pleasures by the number and quality of their conquests, as did promiscuous women, and -- as *Clarissa Harlowe* most convincingly demonstrates -- even exemplary individuals cannot conceive of themselves as separate from their "Friends." However, even as I find compelling and even seductive the correspondences between an eighteenth-century culture of identity and more contemporary notions of the networked self, my project has also insisted on the strangeness of the early modern: the ways in which such composite selves, in fact, may be one of the eighteenth century's most unique and lasting by-products. Indeed, it is perhaps only in this moment -- an era where virtually every citizen shared the polarizing experience of being a political subject extracted from sovereignty and yet not fully integrated into a new public of private individuals, an era in which familial, social, and erotic relationships were simultaneously enduring and fragile -- that a *Clarissa*, a *Spring*, a *Betsy Thoughtless*, or a *Philosophie dans le boudoir* could be written.

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## Notes

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### Introduction

#### Relational Selves

<sup>1</sup> The libertine, while often portrayed in literature as self-interested or self-motivated, is also defined by his multitude of conquests. See, for example, the justification made by the impotent speaker of Rochester's poem "The Imperfect Enjoyment" (*Selected Works*, ed. Frank H. Ellis [London: Penguin Books, 2004], pp. 15-7) that links his understanding of himself as a libertine to his multiple conquests of other beings:

This dart of Love, whose piercing point oft tried,  
With virgin blood ten thousand maids has dyed,  
Which nature still directed with such art  
That it through every cunt reached every heart;  
Stiffly resolved, 'twould carelessly invade  
Woman or boy, nor ought its fury stayed;  
Where'er it pierced, a cunt it found or made. (Ins. 37-43)

Here Rochester exemplifies Todd Parker's description of the libertine as having both a natural and a political/social disposition towards excess: in the Restoration, "Libertines... were not the objects of social scorn for their sexual excesses precisely because those excesses signified a superior form of masculinity that transcended the limits of quotidian society" (*Sexing the Text: The Rhetoric of Sexual Difference in British Literature, 1700-1750* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000], 8).

<sup>2</sup> See Parker's introduction to *Sexing the Text*, but also Thomas Laqueur's *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), which rehearses a similar argument, where he claims that "[s]ometime in the eighteenth century, sex as we know it was invented" (149). Though he is careful to maintain that "no one account of sexual difference triumphed" (152), the argument is still that the eighteenth-century develops and sustains the socially-prescriptive model of sexual difference, as opposed to the more fungible one-sex model of centuries prior.

<sup>3</sup> While studies of *Restoration-era* libertinism in a British context abound, studies of "Enlightenment" libertinism have tended to develop out of attention paid to what Robert Darnton calls "the forbidden best-sellers of pre-revolutionary France": works by Crébillon fils, Duclos, Diderot, Prévost and Laclos, as well as – of course – Sade. (See, for example, Saint-Amand's *The Libertine's Progress: Seduction in the Eighteenth-Century French Novel*, trans. Jennifer Curtiss Gage [Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994], or John Phillips' contextual study of Sade, *Sade: The Libertine Novels* [London: Pluto Press, 2001], as well as Darnton's book [New York: W.W. Norton, 1995]). A recent exception is Peter Cryle and Lisa O'Connell's edited collection, *Libertine Enlightenment: Sex, Liberty and Licence in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) which features articles on Laurence Sterne and Delarivier Manley, among others. Indeed, it is the exciting claim of this collection to connect "libertinism," defined as "the self-aware, philosophically-oriented practice of more or less sexualized freedom," with "libertinage—the vernacular, dissident freedoms of everyday life" (2) across Europe.

<sup>4</sup> For more general debates over the nature of modernity beyond the texts by Foucault and Latour referenced in my introduction, see first Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr and trans. Edmund Jephcott (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2007); see also Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Capitalism & Schizophrenia*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983, 1987). More specific and recent nuances to eighteenth-century concepts of modernity include Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (eds.), *The New 18<sup>th</sup> Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987) and Clifford Siskin and William Warner's edited collection *This is Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). For broader theoretical discussions of posthumanism, see Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Bruno Latour, *The Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge:

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Harvard University Press, 2004); and Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998). The eighteenth-century has taken up the question of the nonhuman in earnest: for a sampling of such work, see Felicity Nussbaum, *The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), Richard Nash, *Wild Enlightenment: The Borders of Human Identity in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 2003), and Mark Blackwell's edited collection *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> The first two of these claims are overlapping, and are often considered together in works that address the origins of the English novel. For work that considers the rise of the novel as literary innovation beyond Ian Watt's influential *The Rise of the Novel* (considered elsewhere in this introduction), see Lennard Davis's *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), Michael McKeon's argument for a dialectical theory of the novel in *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), J. Paul Hunter's hesitatingly nuanced discussion of the "novel's novelty" in *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1990), and Catherine Gallagher's *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). These are, of course, only a smattering of representative examples; the "novelty" and origins of the novel have formed a substantial sub-genre of eighteenth-century literary criticism. Watt also advocates for the "rise" of the reading public, but more lengthy discussions include William Warner's *Licensing Entertainment: The Elevation of Novel Reading in Britain, 1684-1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), in which he describes the rise of a "media culture" in Britain. Considerations of this same novelistic trend in France include Roger Chartier's *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), Dena Goodman's *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) and Robert Darnton's *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co, 1996). For my third claim – that the emergently-modern individual is believed to extricate herself from more communal bodies in this period – see Peter Gay's account of the secular Enlightenment break in *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, especially Volume 1, *The rise of modern paganism* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1966; 1995), Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), and Terry Eagleton's *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality, and Class Struggle in Richardson* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982). There have been some exciting challenges to these paradigms: for a discussion of political difference that considers relations as formative to female identity, see Helen Thompson's *Ingenuous Subjection: Compliance and Power in the Eighteenth-Century Domestic Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); for an example of the shifting affinities of class relations, see Kristina Straub's *Domestic Affairs: Intimacy, Eroticism and Violence Between Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> See the introduction, "From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik – or How to Make Things Public," in *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, Trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1990), 93.

<sup>8</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 26; my emphasis.

<sup>9</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (London: Oxford, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 4.



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<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, 5 (my emphasis).

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, 12. Armstrong has somewhat revised this claim in her later work *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism, 1719-1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> William Warner, "Social Power and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Foucault and Transparent Literary History," in *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1991), 191.

<sup>14</sup> *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956).

<sup>15</sup> *ibid* 177.

<sup>16</sup> Latour, *Making Things Public*, 34.

<sup>17</sup> Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996), 15.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid* 25.

<sup>19</sup> See Jonathan Kramnick, *Actions and Objects from Hobbes to Richardson* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2010) and Julie Park, *The Self and It: Novel Objects in Eighteenth-Century England* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> For example, Park writes "...the eighteenth-century self reached its most lively articulation through the material objects we traditional consider as trivial imitations or supplements of the human: dolls, machines, puppets, wigs, muffs, hats, pens, letters, bound books, and fictional narratives" (*The Self and It*, xiii).

<sup>21</sup> Kramnick, *Actions and Objects* 3.

<sup>22</sup> I use the term "relational self" to refer to a dynamic self at the intersections of his or her emotional, political, social, and sentimental networks, but I know this term has signified in other, more specific theoretical contexts. For example, the "relational self" refers to the psychoanalytic approach to understanding the psyche -- one that asserts that "the psyche cannot be understood as a discrete, autonomous structure," but rather as derived from "relational patterns and interactions," particularly those governed by familial dynamics. See Barbara Ann Schapiro, *Literature and the Relational Self* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 2.

<sup>23</sup> See as examples of comparative approaches that aim for (very broad) contexts while remaining attentive to textual and contextual particulars, Franco Moretti's *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (New York: Verso, 1998) and *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for Literary History* (New York: Verso, 2005), Wai Chee Dimock's *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), and Emily Apter's *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

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## Chapter One

### Spring: James Thomson's *Anxious Affinities*

<sup>1</sup> For the very few works that address early eighteenth-century poetry's relevance to the eighteenth-century's "modernizing moment," see John Sitter's *Literary Loneliness in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), Margaret Doody's *The Daring Muse: Augustan Poetry*

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*Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), Anthony Low's *The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), Blanford Parker's *Triumph of Augustan Poetics: English Literary Culture from Butler to Johnson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), and G. Gabrielle Starr's *Lyric Generations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> For one account of such a shift, see Lynn Hunt's introduction to *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800* (New York: Zone Books, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Particularly by Ralph Cohen, who in *The Art of Discrimination: Thomson's "The Seasons" and the Language of Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), establishes the enormity of the affective response registered in the readers of this period. See, also his chapter on *Spring*, which he calls Thomson's "love song" in *The Unfolding of the Seasons* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), pp. 9-91. I am particularly attracted to Cohen's emphasis on what others have called "process" criticism, "which concerns the making and revising of a work," as opposed to "product" criticism, "which treats the work as a finished artifact" (Gary Morson, "Return to Process: The Unfolding of *The Idiot*," *New Literary History*, Vol. 40 no. 4 [2009], 843).

<sup>4</sup> See John Aikin, *An Essay on the Plan and Character of the Poem On The Seasons* (1788); Sir Harris Nicholas, from the introduction to *The Poetical Works of James Thomson* (London, 1830), cited in Cohen, *The Art of Discrimination* 45-6. Others testify to the intense experience of reading the seasons: "The reader of the *Seasons*," Samuel Johnson mused, "wonders that he never saw before what Thomson shews him, and that he has never yet felt what Thomson impresses" (my emphasis; *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. George Birkbeck and Norman Hill [New York: Octagon Books, 1967], 272). Frances Burney imagined just this type of readerly encounter in *Camilla* (1796), when she describes Melmond, a young scholar, becoming so enraptured by the "truly elegant and feeling description" of *Spring* as he reads it, that he "perceive[s] and regard[s] nothing but what he was about," every so often punctuating his silent reading with "passionate ejaculations," crying out that Thomson's language is "too much! too much!" for him to physically bear. His performance draws a group of spectators who absorbingly witness him "writh[ing]" with the sensations and emotions generated, in swells, by the poetry (eds. Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, [Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 2009] 99-100). In a particularly suggestive example, the eccentric and flamboyant Percival Stockdale speculates in his *Lectures on the Truly Eminent English Poets* (1807) that such an affective response is encouraged by the reciprocal emotion in Thomson's verse. He writes: "The Heart; the Soul is poured forth, in every line. You [the reader] see an anxiety; a tenderness; an interest for the cause which he pleads, which absorbs the whole man..." For Stockdale, who claims that, in Thomson's case, one can in fact "determine what the Author is, from his book," Thomson is left exposed by his poetry, revealed to his reader in all his "anxiety" and "tenderness." But Stockdale more subtly recognizes that such intensely emotional verse also threatens to engulf the poet alongside the reader, to "absorb the whole man" into its passionate "cause."

<sup>5</sup> Thomson wrote frequently and earnestly to Young; as Cohen notes in *The Unfolding of the Seasons*, these letters "reveal the consistency of [his] responses to unreciprocated love" (80), where "[h]is wish of virtuous love was based on a hope doomed to be unfulfilled, and unfulfilled at the moment of composition...[it] function[s] as a realm in which the pain of private experience was concealed behind the praise of a non-existence but wished-for ideal" (87).

<sup>6</sup> For examples of such criticism on Thomson, see Heather Keenleyside's "Personification for the People: On James Thomson's *The Seasons*," *ELH* Vol. 76, no. 2 (Summer 2009), 447-472; Sandro Jung, "Epic, Ode, or Something New: The Blending of Genres in Thomson's *Spring*," *Papers on Language and Literature*, Vol. 43, no. 2 (2007), 146-65, and Shaun Irlam, *Elations: The Poetics of Enthusiasm in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Peter Hanns Reill, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 7.

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<sup>8</sup> In “Personification for the People,” Keenleyside counteracts Ralph Cohen’s claims for periphrasis as a form of differentiation, which he understands as a way of organizing beings into a taxonomy that resembles the emerging natural historical classification system. Keenleyside argues that, in Thomson, these categories are “confound[ed]” rather than “sharpen[ed]”: “‘Human’ is not a stable term in Thomson’s system of periphrastic personifications. If sheep and bees and flowers are personified in these phrases, so are human beings” (*ELH* [2009], 454).

<sup>9</sup> *ibid* 453.

<sup>10</sup> The first of these quotations is from Reill, *Vitalizing Nature*, 7; the second is a reference to Latour’s terminology in *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*.

<sup>11</sup> The *Seasons* is an Augustan poem and “shar[es] with the major poetry of the period an awareness of the valued past, the corruption of this past in the present, the limited nature of human life, and the faith that a better life exists beyond ‘this dark State’” (*The Unfolding of the Seasons*, 1). Thus, the poem is “religious didactic...join[ing] eulogies, elegies, narratives, prospect views, historical catalogs, hymns, etc.” under its unified vision (*ibid*, 3).

<sup>12</sup> Goodman describes her project more specifically as a “literary prehistory to the insight...that some sort of affect or cognitive dissonance registers those unfixed elements of history that exude or exceed the Lockean idea” (*Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism: Poetry and the Mediation of History*, [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008]), 8. Goodman proposes, as I do in this chapter, that georgic poetry often unexpectedly resonates with narratives of modernity: her focus is more specifically on the functions of georgic “media.”

<sup>13</sup> See Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Newton Demands the Muse: Newton’s Opticks and the eighteenth-century poets* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1946) and Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Varied God: A Critical Study of Thomson’s The Seasons* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959). For a more recent account of Thomson’s relationship to the natural landscape, see Tim Fulford, “‘Nature’ Poetry,” *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. John Sitter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). For an interesting counterpoint, see Margaret Doody’s discussion of Thomson as “surreal” and “visionary,” as transcending Nature rather than as subordinating it, in *The Daring Muse: Augustan Poetry Reconsidered* – particularly the chapter on “Charivari and metamorphosis” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>14</sup> For an account of Thomson’s sexual proclivities and the many suspicions of his friends on that score, see James Sambrook’s excellent biography, *James Thomson (1700-1748): A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

<sup>15</sup> See the introduction to James Thomson in David Fairer and Christine Gerrard, eds. *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Anthology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: Blackwell, 2004) in which Thomson is suggestively described as “harbour[ing] a private loneliness and guilt about some of his male friendships” (211).

<sup>16</sup> James Thomson, “On The Hoop,” *The Poetical Works of James Thomson*, Vol. II (London: William Pickering, 1830), 278-9.

<sup>17</sup> This “Song” appears as “Unless with my Amanda blest” in Millar’s edition of *The Works of James Thomson*, vol. 1 (London: Printed for A. Millar, 1752), 228.

<sup>18</sup> *Spring*, l. 505. Unless otherwise noted, I cite from the edition of *Spring* in *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, eds. David Fairer and Christine Gerrard (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 212-238.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*, ll. 518-9, 528.

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<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, ll. 572-3, 576-7.

<sup>21</sup> Thomson's notion of the breast as both generative and receptive would seem more in line with archaic notions of sexual bodies instead of the newly emerging model of complementarity in the eighteenth century. Thomas Laqueur describes the premodern one-sex model thus: "In the blood, semen, milk, and other fluids of the one-sex body, there is no female and no sharp boundary between the sexes. Instead, a physiology of fungible fluids and corporeal flux represents in a different register the absence of specifically genital sex" (Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 35).

<sup>22</sup> For the few but lively discussions of the breast-as-landscape specific to eighteenth-century Britain, see Ruth Perry, "Colonizing the Breast: Sexuality and Maternity in Eighteenth-Century England," *Eighteenth-Century Life*, Vol. 2, no.2 (1991), 204-234, as well as Anne K. Mellor's *Romanticism and Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1993), Marilyn Francus's "The Monstrous Mother: Reproductive Anxiety in Swift and Pope," *ELH*, Vol. 61 (1994), 829-851, and Julie Kipp's *Romanticism, Modernity and the Body Politic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 67

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* 9.

<sup>25</sup> Gillian Rose, *Feminism & Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 88.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* 89.

<sup>27</sup> In her seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Mulvey declares that "The paradox of phallogentrism in all its manifestations is that it depends on the image of the castrated women [*sic*] to give order and meaning to its world... To summarize briefly: the function of woman in forming the patriarchal unconscious is twofold: she first symbolizes the castration threat by her real lack of a penis and secondly thereby raises her child into the symbolic. Once this has been achieved, her meaning in the process is at an end. It does not last into the world of law and language except as a memory, which oscillates between memory of maternal plenitude and memory of lack" (originally published in *Screen* in 1975, reprinted in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009], 14-15). In her introduction to the second edition of *Visual and Other Pleasures* published in 2009 Mulvey revises many of her conclusions about the voyeuristic aspects of cinema, in light of new technologies and developments in feminism over the past twenty years. She moves away from the more straightforward "gaze" described in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" to the more complex notions of "enigmas" and "curiosity," which suggest a less dialectical and, even, more manifold mechanism at work in the processes of looking. Still, Mulvey's formulation is useful to me here -- particularly in Rose's lovely summation of it -- because it helpfully describes the way in which the gaze is simultaneously a looking at Self and Other, precisely the kind of looking I go on to argue that Thomson does in the world of *Spring*.

<sup>28</sup> Sambrook discusses Thomson's professional and personal relationship with Hertford at some length in the chapter on "Spring" in *James Thomson, A Life*.

<sup>29</sup> There are three essays exploring this relationship, spanning approximately 50 years (from 1928-1976) by three principal authors. Beginning with Helen Sard Hughes's 1928 essay in *Modern Philology*, vol. 25 no. 4, "Thomson and the Countess of Hertford," followed by its sequel, "Thomson and Lady Hertford Again," *Modern Philology*, Vol. 28 (1931), the topic is picked up again in earnest by Hilbert H. Campbell in the 1970s, who inherits Hughes' fascination and builds upon it with his title "Thomson and the Countess of Hertford Yet Again" (*Modern Philology*, Vol. 67, no. 4 [May 1970]). In 1996, Alexander Lindsay also published a note in *The Review of English Studies*, "Thomson and the Countess of Hertford Yet Once

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More,” that establishes Hertford as the subject of “To Seraphina,” a fragment in Lyttleton’s manuscript. Others, including Spacks (in *The Varied God*) and Ralph Cohen (in *The Unfolding of the Seasons*), and, of course, Sambrook, show an interest but do not explore the relationship in much depth.

<sup>30</sup> Cited in Hughes, “Thomson and the Countess of Hertford” 444.

<sup>31</sup> Hughes recounts a number of insights gleaned from her “examination of certain papers of the Percy family at Alnwick Castle.” Hughes, for example, records a lovely anecdote in which Countess Hertford signed her copy of Thomson’s earliest version of “A Hymn on Solitude” with the name “F[rances]. Hartford,” Thomson’s pet-name for her in *Spring* (“Thomson and the Countess of Hertford,” 447).

<sup>32</sup> See Hughes 447.

<sup>33</sup> Cited in Hughes, ll. 44-9. The final lines, published in 1729 in *Miscellaneous Poems, by Several Hands...Publish’d by Mr. Ralph*, recall the earliest known version of the poem and read:

Oh, let me pierce thy secret Cell!  
And in thy deep Recesses dwell;  
For ever with thy Raptures fir’d,  
For ever from the World retir’d;  
Nor by a mortal seen, save he  
A LYCIDAS, or LYCON be. (44-9)

Hughes notes that “the B Version was subjected to certain minor changes—the rearrangement of certain lines, and two or three verbal changes, the most important of which was the replacing of “secret hill” of the B version by “secret cell” of the A version...” (449).

<sup>34</sup> Hughes may have suspected that Thomson was in love with his patron, but her efforts were focused on dismissing Samuel Johnson’s claim that Thomson fell out of favor with his patron and that Hertford did not support any of his other projects. She imagines herself “rescu[ing] a literary lady from the unmerited disparagement of Dr. Johnson,” a “pleasant privilege even after many years” (“Thomson and the Countess of Hertford,” 439). She only goes so far as to say that the two had a “friendly intercourse....which... Thomson enjoyed for many years” (“Thomson and Lady Hertford Again,” 468). Of course, her findings are much more suggestive, but she seems unwilling -- or unable -- to explore their erotic significance.

<sup>35</sup> Sambrook calls her this in *Thomson: A Life*, 62-3.

<sup>36</sup> ll. 3, 11, 13-6. Reprinted in its entirety in H.H. Campbell, “Thomson and the Countess of Hertford Yet Again,” *Modern Philology* 67 (1970), 367-9; also quoted in Sambrook, *Thomson: A Life* 62.

<sup>37</sup> The poem initially had a different ending. See Campbell, “Thomson and the Countess of Hertford Yet Again,” 367-8.

<sup>38</sup> Cited in *ibid*, 367-8, ll. 21-4.

<sup>39</sup> *Spring* ll. 1-4.

<sup>40</sup> Reill, *Vitalizing Nature*, 5.

<sup>41</sup> Cohen, *Unfolding* 13.

<sup>42</sup> Cohen, *Unfolding* 13, where he describes this process as a collaborative enterprise: “*Spring* is a world governed by the principle of communal good achieved through the tempered mixture of individual wills. Thomson’s notion of the will is so comprehensive as to extend to brute, vegetative, and even elemental creation. In this bountiful universe, mixture enables the providential and the plentiful, as when Nature ‘mixes’ seed with land to generate the ‘food of Man.’”

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With such a liberal hand has Nature flung  
...Seeds abroad, blown them about in Winds,  
Innumerable mix'd them with the nursing Mold,  
The moistening Current, and prolifick Rain." (ll. 230-3)

<sup>43</sup> *Spring* ll. 185, 188.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid*, 568-71.

<sup>45</sup> Curiously, in this moment Thomson also emphasizes the capacity of nature to sentimentalize and refine an otherwise brutish human, "who dip[s] his Tongue in Gore," by teaching him "alone to weep":

"But *Man*, whom Nature form'd of milder Clay,  
With every kind Emotion in his Heart,  
And taught alone to weep; while from her Lap  
She pours ten thousand Delicacies, Herbs,  
And Fruits, as numerous as the Drops of Rain  
Or Beams that gave them Birth: shall he, fair Form!  
Who wears sweet Smiles, and looks erect on Heaven,  
E'er stoop to mingle with the prowling Herd,  
And dip his Tongue in Gore?" (ll. 349-357)

<sup>46</sup> Jean-Joseph Goux, *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud*, trans. Jennifer Curtiss Gage (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 227.

<sup>47</sup> Throughout this chapter, Reill's *Vitalizing Nature* has been my touchstone for Thomson's understanding of living, natural matter; for a more extensive history, see also John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996). Thomson's specific influences came from his education at the progressive and liberal Divinity School in Edinburgh under William Hamilton, a latitudinarian who associated with the Newtonians in England, particularly Robert Stewart. Hamilton was also involved in Whig politics – particularly, in his role as Principal of the Church of Scotland in the 1730s – but he was also rather controversially supportive of landed property rights. Upon coming to London as a young poet, Thomson would also fall in with a collaborative, Whiggish coterie of poets and authors: the Hillerian Circle, whose members included Eliza Haywood, Richard Savage, and of course, Aaron Hill himself. Hill was, like Thomson, interested in Newtonian science and in the collaborative mechanics of the natural world. For more on these influences, see Nicholson, *Newton Demands the Muse*; Sambrook, *Thomson: A Life* (particularly pp. 20-29); and Christine Gerrard's study of the Hillerian Circle, *Aaron Hill: The Muses' Projector, 1685-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> *Spring*, ll. 5-10.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid* l. 982.

<sup>50</sup> Spacks, *Reading Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); for her discussion of Thomson, see especially 2, 20, 36, 44-5.

<sup>51</sup> See, again, Keenleyside's "Personification for the People," *ELH* (2009) for a provocative discussion of Thomson's formal experimentation.

<sup>52</sup> Jung, "Epic, Ode, or Something New: The Blending of Genres in Thomson's *Spring*," *Papers on Language and Literature* (2007), 153.

<sup>53</sup> See Irlam, *Elations*, especially 113-141.

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<sup>54</sup> Irlam has characterized the turn towards the “Vast” in Addison’s *Pleasures of the Imagination* as “a diversion of sentiment from an unmediated, supernatural infinity to an infinite, potentially divinized Nature and to the enormous emotive resources that landscape and space furnish to eighteenth-century poetry,” in *Elations*, 83.

<sup>55</sup> my emphasis; Addison, *The Spectator* 412, June 21, 1712.

<sup>56</sup> Addison, *The Spectator* 519, October 25, 1712.

<sup>57</sup> Goux, *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud* 228.

<sup>58</sup> Addison, *The Spectator* 519, Saturday October 25, 1712.

<sup>59</sup> Thomson, *A Poem Sacred to Issac Newton*, in *The Complete Works*, ll. 100-2. For more on the Newtonian influences of *Spring*, see Sambrook, *Thomson: A Life* (especially pp. 57-73); Nicholson, *Newton Demands the Muse*; for the relationship of Thomson’s politics and aesthetics to both Newtonianism and Shaftesburian benevolism, see Phillip Connell, “Newtonian Physico-Theology and the Varieties of Whiggism in James Thomson’s *The Seasons*,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* Vol. 72, no. 1 (2009), 1-28.

<sup>60</sup> Thomson, *A Poem Sacred*, ll. 102-11; 96, 98; 116-8.

<sup>61</sup> Henry Oldenburg, “A Letter of Mr Isaac Newton...containing His New Theory about Light and Colors,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, London*, Feb. 19 1671/72, Vol. 80, 3075-3087.

<sup>62</sup> my emphasis; Thomson, *Spring* ll. 103-6, 109-11.

<sup>63</sup> Responding in the same letter to the charge that a fellow scientist had, in fat, produced “white light” from *compound* (and thus, already mixed) colors, Newton flatly stated: “The rays of light do not act on one another in passing through the same Medium” (Oldenburg, “A Letter of Mr Isaac Newton,” 3078).

<sup>64</sup> According to Reill, “The basic epistemological problem was to understand the meaning of these signs [of nature] and to perceive the interaction of the individual yet linked active forces, powers, and energies without collapsing one into the other. To resolve this problem Enlightenment vitalists called for a form of understanding that combined individualized elements of nature’s variety into a harmonic conjunction that recognized both nature’s unity and diversity” (*Vitalizing Nature* 8).

<sup>65</sup> Although Thomson is using synaesthesia in a straightforward way here, I cannot help but note the suggestiveness of its definition: it is also when “the sensation in one body part produced by a stimulus applied to another body part” (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

<sup>66</sup> Here, I am indebted to Cohen’s insight, who notes that “the product is already inhered in the process,” where the eye sees in the image of procreation and generation layers of the seasons, of the natural world. Winter also appears and lingers at the beginning of *Spring* (*Unfolding* 15).

<sup>67</sup> Thomson, *Spring* l. 121.

<sup>68</sup> As a technique, periphrasis provides the reader with a highly specific and particularized image. For critics like Cohen, this specificity is indicative of “fragmentary experience that, in different perspectives, provides aspects of an unattainable whole” (Cohen, *Unfolding* 77).

<sup>69</sup> Thomson, *Spring* ll. 823, 179.

<sup>70</sup> Keenleyside writes: “‘Human’ is not a stable term in Thomson’s system of periphrastic personifications. If sheep and bees and flowers are personified in these phrases, so are human beings.” Keenleyside goes on

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to argue that Thomson uses general terms like “people” in the way that Claude Levi-Strauss understands the term “species” – as a “medial classifier” – where “species drives a perpetual movement between universalization and particularization, in which the particular is not opposed but consequent to the individual” (“Personification for the People” 454).

<sup>71</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets: Life of Thomson*. Johnson also says of Thomson: “He thinks in a particular train, and he thinks always as a man of genius; he looks round on Nature and on Life with the eye which Nature bestows only on a poet, *the eye that distinguishes in every thing presented to its view whatever there is in which imagination can delight to be detained, and with a mind that at once comprehends the vast, and attends to the minute*. The reader of *The Seasons* wonders that he never saw before what Thomson shows him, and that he never yet has felt what Thomson impresses” (298-99).

<sup>72</sup> Thomson, *Spring* ll. 468-76.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, l. 480.

<sup>74</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa; Or the History of A Young Lady*. Ed. Angus Ross (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 163.

<sup>75</sup> Sambrook *Thomson: A Life* 223; see also *James Thomson: Letters and Documents*, ed. Alan Dugald McKillop (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1958), 165-6.

<sup>76</sup> See Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.

<sup>77</sup> Thomson, *Spring* ll. 483-4.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, ll. 494-8.

<sup>79</sup> I am always reminded, in any moment where Thomson charges us to “See,” of Johnson’s observation that as readers “we wonder why we have never seen before what Thomson *shows us*.” *Lives of the Poets: Life of Thomson*, 299.

<sup>80</sup> See Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, 14-30.

<sup>81</sup> Thomson, *Spring* l. 489-90.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, l. 492.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*, ll. 511-2. This image recurs later in the same scene as Thomson describes in delight the “various vegetative Tribes / Wrapt in a filmy Net,” as they suggestively drink from one another, “suck[ing]” and “swell[ing]” together, now an indistinguishable “twining Mass of Tubes” (ll. 556-66). The speaker and his “panting Muse,” satiated together by this imagery of consummated vegetable love, “ascend” together from “the vegetable World” with a new “Theme” revealed: “*the Passion of the Groves*,” Thomson’s theorization of sexual love as fulfilling a higher communal purpose (ll. 572-5, 81).

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, ll. 518, 555.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, l. 519.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, ll. 517, 525.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, ll. 526-44.



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<sup>88</sup> See Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, no. 3 (Autumn, 1988), 575-599, in which she describes the refusal to accept empirical categories as a form of feminist resistance. Keenleyside observes this as well in her rebuttal to Cohen: she sees periphrasis as a way of organizing beings into a taxonomy that resembles the emerging natural historical classification system, but serves to "confound" rather than to sharpen its categories. She writes, "'Human' is not a stable term in Thomson's system of periphrastic personifications. If sheep and bees and flowers are personified in these phrases, so are human beings." Keenleyside shows how Thomson uses "people" in the same way that Claude Levi-Strauss understands "species" – as a "medial classifier" where the term "drives a perpetual movement between universalization and particularization, in which the particular is not opposed but consequent to the individual" ("Personification for the People" 454).

<sup>89</sup> "Polyanthus," *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Accessed October 28, 2008.

<sup>90</sup> Doody offers a provocative reading of this scene in *The Daring Muse*, p. 161.

<sup>91</sup> Thomson, *Spring* ll. 545-5.

<sup>92</sup> Given that Thomson has a fondness for anthropomorphizing his songbirds – whom he refers to as "the plummy People" in line 165) – it is easy to imagine a bird "wing" as analogous to the human "hand."

<sup>93</sup> The phrase "Wonders of his Hand" certainly lend themselves to a reading of the florist as a divine presence, perhaps even as an extension of the "UNIVERSAL SOUL" that appears only a few lines later. But Thomson is careful to maintain that this is material work carried out by a specifically human – and thus, this-worldly – hand. However, in the passage where he praises the "UNIVERSAL SOUL" as the "SOURCE OF BEINGS," it is described in a manner reminiscent of the gardener, "who, with a Master-hand, / Hast the great Whole into Perfection touch'd" (ll. 556, 559-60).

<sup>94</sup> *ibid*, ll. 505-7.

<sup>95</sup> *ibid*, ll. 567-8, 574.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid*, ll. 570-1.

<sup>97</sup> Building from yet another image of shared vision – the confluence of his "varied Verse" with the "mazy-running Soul" of the birds' perpetual "Melody" – the poem thus proceeds by making a lengthy description of the colorful, diverse world of what are elsewhere referred to as the "plummy People" (l. 165): this, in language and structure strikingly similar to that of the multiplicitous plant world the reader has just left. Though it is some of the richest language in the poem and well worth the luxury of a read, I do not cite extensively from it here.

<sup>98</sup> The passage in its entirety:

As rising from the vegetable World,  
My Theme ascends, with equal Wing ascend,  
My panting Muse; and hark, how loud the Woods  
Invite you forth in all your gayest Trim.  
Lend *me* your Song, ye Nightingales! oh pour  
The mazy-running Soul of Melody  
Into *my* varied Verse!... (ll. 572-7)

<sup>99</sup> *ibid* ll. 74-7.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid*, ll. 78-83.

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<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, ll. 97, 99-101.

<sup>102</sup> See lns. 114-142, as an example of this kind of imagery.

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*, ll. 456-64.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*, ll. 959, 962-6.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, ll. 967-9.

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*, ll. 970-5.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*, l. 1114-5.

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*, l. 1116-9.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*, 296-300.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*, ll. 1126-8. Just prior to the poem's final scene of mutual bliss, Thomson introduces two scenes of failed coupling to illustrate how the perversion of sexual passion does not serve what he considers the sacred "Purpose" of love. See especially lines 959-75 and lines 1010-112.

<sup>111</sup> *ibid.*, ll. 1123-5.

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*, ll. 1173-4.

<sup>113</sup> *Spring* 1735. ll. 1085-6.

<sup>114</sup> Thomson, *Spring* ll. 1167-72.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*, ll. 1168-9.

## *Chapter Two*

### *Clarissa: Collective Relations and the Problem of Sexual Autonomy*

<sup>1</sup> This and all references to the text of *Clarissa* refer to the Penguin Books edition edited by Angus Ross (1985). This quotation appears on p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 90-1.

<sup>3</sup> Particularly by William Warner, whose work on *Clarissa* this chapter will engage in greater detail, but also Tom Keymer's *Richardson's Clarissa and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), Tiffany Potter's "'A Certain Sign That He is One of Us': *Clarissa's* Other Libertines," in *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 11 no. 4 (1999), 403-420, and Jocelyn Harris's chapter "Protean Lovelace," in *Passion and Virtue: Essays on the Novels of Samuel Richardson*, ed. David Blewett (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001). For any interesting counterpoint, see John Allen Stevenson, "'Alien Spirits': The Unity of Lovelace and Clarissa," in *New Essays on Samuel Richardson*, ed. Albert J. Rivero (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996). Stevenson argues, as I do, that *Clarissa* and *Lovelace* are

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more aligned than is usually expected; however, his argument is based on the claim that both eschew sexual pleasure, whereas mine is precisely based on both characters' embrace of it.

<sup>4</sup> See Ruth Perry, *Novel Relations: The Transformation of Kinship in English Literature and Culture, 1748-1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), in which she studies "the uncharted literary terrain of the novel from 1748 to 1818, the *terra incognita* between Samuel Richardson and Jane Austen" (3).

<sup>5</sup> One early critic sums Lovelace up perfectly: he "is not Lucifer, but a type as perennial and common and odious as Pamela's, that of the over-grown schoolboy, a schoolboy soaked in the lust of adolescence, intoxicated with a sense of power and of immense intellectual superiority (*soi-disant* genius) which a careful preference for the society of inferiors confers and which in his eyes invests all that he does and thinks with a sheen worthy of the best effects of Covent Garden or Drury Lane" (Brian W. Downs, *Richardson* [London: Routledge and Sons, 1928], 116). In his attempt to account for the "clashing rhetorics" of Clarissa and Lovelace, Serge Soupel insists that "[Lovelace] is a devil" and "[Clarissa] is an angel." Thus "the angel Clarissa belongs to a sphere radically separate from Lovelace's," one that is initially less "urban and worldly," in opposition to Lovelace's rhetorical sophistication, his "all-embracing linguistic virtuosity" ("Clarissa vs. Lovelace: The Appropriation of Space and Clashing Rhetorics," in *Clarissa and Her Readers: New Essays for the Clarissa Project*, eds. Carol Houlihan Flynn and Edward Copeland [New York: AMS Press, 1999], 163, 166). Thomas Keymer has described Lovelace as a "plotter," in which Clarissa "is a novel about the ruin of a society, in which Lovelace is cast as the primary agent of ruin," "throw[ing] into turmoil the world of Harlowe Place" (in *Richardson's Clarissa and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 157). For a work that views the relationship between Clarissa and Lovelace as inherently oppositional, with Lovelace as dynamic and capacious in his desire, while still considering Clarissa's role as equally vital to the novel's textual dynamics, see the recent work by J.E. Fowler, *The Libertine's Nemesis: The Prude in Clarissa and the Roman libertin* (London: Legenda, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Judith Wilt's excellent article, "He Could Go No Further: A Modest Proposal about Lovelace and Clarissa" (*PMLA*, Vol. 92, no. 1 [Jan. 1977], 19-32), opens up the possibility that Lovelace did not, in fact, rape Clarissa himself, but that the act was instead perpetrated by his accomplices, the "vile women" that both Clarissa and Lovelace fear. Sandra MacPherson argues, in a vein resonant with my own claims, that Lovelace is dependent upon the very contractual systems that he purports to subvert: so that "an appeal to explicitness—to legal and moral discriminations based on the presence or absence of signs of consent—will help to determine accountability is what rakes like Mr. B and Lovelace *rely* upon, both to perpetrate matrimonial frauds, and to escape prosecution or censure for the harms such frauds inevitably produce" ("Lovelace Ltd.," *ELH*, vol. 65, no. 1 [1998], 99-121), 102.

<sup>7</sup> Richardson, *Clarissa*, 147.

<sup>8</sup> Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 210.

<sup>9</sup> Richardson, *Clarissa* 88.

<sup>10</sup> This chapter questions claims by historians of the novel that see *Clarissa* as a defining text in the shaping of early modern *private*, or *individual*, experience. Ian Watt, even as he acknowledges that the novel form hinges on the "conflict between public and private attitudes," still values the interiority and private affective experience of Richardson's characters over the novel's public "attitudes," as these aspects serve to strengthen his assertions about the novel's relationship to a specifically eighteenth-century "rise of individualism" (*Rise of the Novel*, 168). According to Watt, Clarissa is the "heroic representation of all that is free and positive in the new individualism," as she "escapes...[the] oppressions [of her family]" and "struggle[s]" on "a purely individual plane" against the patriarchal institutions that strive to subdue her (ibid 222; 224).

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<sup>11</sup> Watt, *Rise of the Novel*, 63, 66, 68.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, 222.

<sup>13</sup> my emphasis; *ibid* 154.

<sup>14</sup> Watt writes that “[The direction of Richardson’s narration] is towards the delineation of the domestic life, and the private experience of the characters who belong to it: the two go together – we get inside their minds as well as inside their houses” (*Rise of the Novel* 175). Terry Eagleton also observes that, “[f]or Richardson, ‘absence becomes to soul of writing’ in two opposed senses: on the one hand, less gloomily, the soul of the real is fleshed into full presence only by the withdrawal of the trivially physical” (*The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982], 44).

<sup>15</sup> In *The Self and It: Novel Objects in Eighteenth-Century England* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2010), Julie Park claims that *Clarissa* is a text which, like *Pamela* before it, “defines female subjectivity in relation to the body,” but here Richardson, “by depicting and collaborating with Lovelace’s male subjectivity in order to represents Clarissa’s subjectivity...stages the sexual dynamics of fetishism, which lay bare the sexually constructivist properties of the novel of sensibility, and, in turn, the fictional properties of the fetishized body part” (52).

<sup>16</sup> Sometimes Clarissa’s writing itself supplies similar evidence of emotion, as when she is worried about a clandestine meeting with Lovelace and weeps to Anna, “Don’t you see how crooked some of my lines are? Don’t you see how some of the letters stagger more than others!” (*Clarissa*, 368). At other times, actual corporeal evidence of the body’s emotion invokes hidden or implicit meaning, as when Clarissa’s mother indulges her with a brief, perfunctory note, which Clarissa hungrily kisses because it “is wet in one place...blistered...with a mother’s tear!” – evidence, at least, that this author feels more regret than the bare language appears to convey (*ibid* 227). These kinds of physical markers offer an accompanying sentimental script that can either refute or amplify the letter’s written information.

<sup>17</sup> See Helen Thompson, *Ingenious Subjection: Compliance and Power in the Eighteenth-Century Domestic Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), particularly the introduction, pp.1-24 and her discussion of Richardson’s *Pamela* I and II, “‘The Words *Command* and *Obey*: *Pamela* and Domestic Modernity,” 87-123. Terry Eagleton also contextualizes this paradox in his reading of *Clarissa* as a book brimming with historically-situated, ideological class tensions: “[The bourgeoisie’s] relation to the aristocracy, like Richardson’s own curious blend of mildness and militancy, was sadomasochistic: humbly submissive to gentility, it savaged luxury and licentiousness; bowed to the sacredness of social hierarchy, it vigorously affirmed its individualism” (*Rape of Clarissa*, 4).

<sup>18</sup> Richardson, *Clarissa* 44.

<sup>19</sup> Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991) 190, 187.

<sup>20</sup> In *Rape of Clarissa*, 21.

<sup>21</sup> In William Warner, *Reading Clarissa: The Struggles of Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 3.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of Lovelace’s figurative penetration and fetishization of Clarissa’s writing, see Park, “The Inside Out: Representing Sex in Ethereals”, in *The Self & It*, 70-76.

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<sup>23</sup> One excellent example of such a reader is Lady Dorothy Bradshaigh. Richardson responds, rather humorously if not entirely sarcastically, to Lady Bradshaigh's desire for Lovelace to reform and propose to Clarissa in a letter dated 26 Oct. 1748, writing: "Had I drawn my Heroine reconciled to Relations unworthy of her, nobly resisting the Attacks of an intrepid Lover; overcoming her Persecutors; and baffling the wicked Designs formed against her Honour, marrying her Lovelace, and that on her own Terms—educating properly and instructing her Children—What however usefull, however pleasing the Lesson, I had done more than I had done in Pamela?...And as to reforming and marrying Lovelace, and the Example to be given by it, what but This that follows, would it have been, instead of the amiable one your Good nature and Humanity point out?—Here, 'says another Lovelace, may I pass the the Flower and Prime of my Youth, in forming and pursuing the most insidious Enterprizes...I may at last meet with and attempt a Clarissa, a Lady of peerless Virtue. I may try her, vex her, plague and torment her worthy Heart. I may set up all my Batteries against her Virtue. And if I find her Proof against all my Machinations, and myself tired with rambling, I may then reward that Virtue. I may graciously extend my Hand. She may give me hers, and rejoice and thank Heaven for my Condescension in her Favour. The Almighty I may suppose, at the same Time to be as ready with his Mercy, forgoing his Justice on my past Crimes, as if my Nuptials with this meritorious Fair One were to atone for the numerous Distresses and Ruins I have occasioned in other Families: And all the Good-natured the Worthy, the Humane part of the World, forgiving me too, because I am a handsome and an humorous Fellow, will clap their Hands with joy and cry out—

'Happy, happy, happy pair!

None but the Rake deserves the Fair!'”

(In *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964], 92-3).

<sup>24</sup> Warner, *Reading Clarissa* vii.

<sup>25</sup> Richardson, in fact, expressly states in his letters that he “hoped to make [*Clarissa*] a more noble and useful story than Pamela's.” He writes to Aaron Hill in the Winter of 1746 of *Pamela* that “...since I find my principal Design and End so liable to be misapprehended; and the Story so likely to be thought *Inferior*, which I thought *Superior*, bating the supposed Tragical (tho' I think it *Triumphant* Catastrophe, which cannot recommend it as to Sale, as a prosperous and rewarded *Virtue* could...” (qtd. in T.C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel, *Samuel Richardson: A Biography* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971], 211).

<sup>26</sup> See, as a few representative examples, Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Terry Castle, “P/B: *Pamela* as Sexual Fiction,” *Studies in English Literature*, Vol. 22, no. 3 (Summer 1982), 469-489; Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); Brian McCrea, “Clarissa's Pregnancy and the Fate of Patriarchal Power,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 9, no. 2 (January 1997), 125-148; Gordon D. Fulton, *Styles of Meaning and Meanings of Style in Richardson's Clarissa* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1999), as well as Park, *The Self and It*; Keymer, *Richardson's Clarissa and the Eighteenth-Century Reader*; and, of course, Warner, *Reading Clarissa*.

<sup>27</sup> Eagleton concludes by casting his observation in the locus of literary individualism and bourgeois self-interest: “Clarissa has the unenviable choice of becoming a pawn in the Harlowe's property game or Lovelace's erotic object. Yet this contradiction between bourgeois property and aristocratic anarchy conceals a deeper complicity. Both display a form of possessive individualism” (*Rape of Clarissa* 88; 82).

<sup>28</sup> Park, *The Self & It*, 52.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*, 73. For example, in her discussions of how “the status of the letter...plays a central role” in the representation and fetishization of female sexuality, Park cites both “Richardson's ‘writing to the moment’ and Lovelace's ‘lively present-tense manner’” as exemplary of both their complicity and of their shared subconscious desire for human contact, as “both modes consciously attempt to shorten the temporary and spatial distance between bodies communicating to each other” (*The Self and It*, 71). However, in this discussion she leaves out the novel's most prominent and exemplary representation of such a style – the

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writing of Clarissa and Anna Howe, which Anna describes as being “in so full a manner” as to encompass even the most mundane details (*Clarissa* 40), and which Clarissa describes as writing “minutely,” and exceedingly pleasurable, a “delight...equal to that which [she] take[s] in conversing with [Anna] – by letter,” when not “in person” (ibid 53). Indeed, in many ways Park’s entire reading ignores Clarissa and humanizes and even exculpates Lovelace, whom she reads as – akin to Freud’s fetish-curious peeping Tom – a little boy abandoned by his first love.

<sup>30</sup> Eagleton, *Rape* 67-9.

<sup>31</sup> In other words, this is precisely the kind of reading that a “new” formalism would want to recoup, bringing a more historical or cultural perspective to bear on the textual findings of Warner. Perhaps the most well-known and radical work on rape and representation comes from Catherine MacKinnon, who in her book *Only Words* (Harvard University Press, 1993) makes the claim that “Pornography is masturbation material. It is used as sex. It therefore is sex” (cited in *Feminism and Pornography* 101). MacKinnon, along with Andrea Dworkin and the other members of the feminist group Women Against Pornography, famously used this argument to make pornographic film, books and magazines legally actionable as acts of sexual assault in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

<sup>32</sup> Warner, *Reading Clarissa*, 3. In a much less controversial piece of writing, Siobhán Kilfeather has fleshed out this “interpretative alliance,” chiding the tendency for critics to replicate the same stories about Richardson’s novels. Kilfeather insightfully recognizes that the short-hand of Richardsonian criticism – mainly, arguments about privacy, interiority, and the integrity of the individual self – remains relatively undisputed in spite of a richly various spectrum of readings (“The Rise of Richardson Criticism,” in *Samuel Richardson: Tercentenary Essays*, Eds. Margaret Doody and Peter Sabor [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989] 254)

<sup>33</sup> In her book – in many ways a response to Warner – *Clarissa’s Ciphers: Meaning and Disruption in Richardson’s ‘Clarissa’* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), Castle takes the position that interpretation is, in itself, an act of violence: the “subject” of her book “is the matter of exegesis: how it operates within *Clarissa*, both as a mode of human contact and as a mode of violence, the ways in which it may be said to condition the heroine’s fate, and ultimately, how this internal revelation affects reading outside the text, our confrontation with the fiction itself” (16). For a more detailed reading of Castle’s text as a response to Warner’s, see Andrew J. Scheiber, “‘Between Me and Myself’: Writing as Strategy and Theme in *Clarissa*,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, Vol. 30, no. 4 (Winter 1988), 496-509.

<sup>34</sup> Warner, *Reading Clarissa* 49.

<sup>35</sup> ibid 6.

<sup>36</sup> ibid 26.

<sup>37</sup> There are many examples of a counter-narrative to the presumed Enlightenment valorization of a naturalized neoclassical unity, but perhaps none more influential than Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno’s book *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (1987; 2002). A more germane discussion of selfhood as dynamic is that of Dror Wahrman in *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (Yale University Press, 2004). WATT on *Clarissa* p: 212-213 when he describes how ridiculous C can seem to contemporaries.

<sup>38</sup> ibid, 5. Warner argues earlier in the text that “struggle” is the “pervasive and continuous reality” of *Clarissa* (3); that it is the “matrix out of which the novel emerges, and all things are subdued” (5).

<sup>39</sup> ibid 29.

<sup>40</sup> ibid 30.

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid* 75-6.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid* 76.

<sup>43</sup> In response to Lady Bradsheigh's suggestion that he had "drawn a Character above Nature," Richardson replies, "But have I really made Clarissa what the Woman of Virtue, of Christian Virtue, cannot be? – Surely I have not. Have you not seen from Infancy in her, by the help of her worthy Norton, and the good Dr. Lewen (as in Lovelace the early Libertine) in her the early Saint?—The one in a manner calling out for Punishment—The other for a heavenly Crown?...If I have exalted her above her Sex, it is by her Behaviour in her Trials. You will allow that she shall have Trials—But why to pursue your Scheme is a Person so good to be distressed at all?—Why by a Lovelace?—Why is he to be rewarded with so good a Wife?" (in *Selected Letters*, ed. Carroll, 93-4).

<sup>44</sup> *ibid*, 67.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid*, 37.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid*, 39.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid*, 32 .

<sup>48</sup> *ibid*, 73.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid*, 73.

<sup>50</sup> Park, for example, insightfully read Clarissa's sentimental self-representations, such as the one I have cited above, as one example of the correspondence between eighteenth-century sensibility and early twentieth-century ideas about the fetish, showing how "the eighteenth century's sensibility fosters some of fetishism's most important features, especially through the 'perverting' influences of Lovelace's libertinism" (52). I would agree that, in such an instance, something like a tear or a sob can become a kind of symbolic referent standing in for Lovelace's own reflected desire; I would also urge readers to consider, more immediately, the logical conclusion of such a claim: that tears can *mean* rather infinitely, allowing for multiple interpretations based on what the interpreter wants to see. Lovelace seems to recognize that Clarissa exploits this with her family, but perhaps is too arrogant to recognize that she also exploits this expectation with him.

<sup>51</sup> Warner, *Reading Clarissa* 49.

<sup>52</sup> Richardson, *Clarissa* 883.

<sup>53</sup> Richardson, *Clarissa* 890.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid* 890.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid* 891.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid* 893.

<sup>57</sup> Park is the rare exception; she sees this moment as one in which Lovelace is rendered impotent by the rape. She argues "Attempting to document the rape, Lovelace's text shows especially how male subjectivity fails in representing its desire. This page, like Clarissa's fragments, is visually striking in its

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typographic inconsistency: instead of a full page of text following the last details of events, up to the rape itself...there appears, under Letter 257, both a gap and a statement by Lovelace illustrating his lack of phallic composure, or, his inability to write..." (74).

<sup>58</sup> *ibid*, 75.

<sup>59</sup> See Ross's introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of *Clarissa*, 23.

<sup>60</sup> Sade's *Justine, ou les malheurs de la vertue* (1799), has been read as a parody of *Clarissa*'s sadistic adherence to virtue: Justine, in her refusal to behave in any way other than virtuously, suffers rape after rape while her sister, Juliette embraces vice and finds herself elevated in society and respected by men. I discuss this text in more depth at the beginning of Chapter Four.

<sup>61</sup> See Warner, *Reading Clarissa* 62.

<sup>62</sup> See, as representative examples of critics who discuss the erotic dimensions of Fantomina's masquerade, Tiffany Potter, "The Language of Feminised Sexuality: Gendered Voice in Eliza Haywood's *Love in Excess* and *Fantomina*," *Women's Writing* 10 (2003): 169-86; Kirsten T. Saxton and Rebecca P. Boccicchio in their introduction to *The Passionate Fictions of Eliza Haywood: Essays on Her Life and Work* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000); Ros Ballaster's chapter on Haywood in *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684-1740* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Helen Thompson, "Plotting Materialism: W. Charleton's 'The Ephesian Matron,' E. Haywood's 'Fantomina,' and Feminine Consistency," *Eighteenth Century Studies*, Vol. 35, no. 2 (Winter, 2002), 195-214.

<sup>63</sup> Thompson, "Plotting Materialism," 200; 203.

<sup>64</sup> Richardson, *Clarissa* 1371-5.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid* 41.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid* 253.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid* 230.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid* 254.

<sup>69</sup> See, specifically for a discussion of the perversity of desire in *Clarissa*, Terry Castle's essay "Lovelace's Dream," in *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), especially pp. 60-1.

<sup>70</sup> Richardson, *Clarissa* 192.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid* 194.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid* 85.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid* 194.

<sup>74</sup> There are two relevant definitions of the word "cipher," here: 1) "an arithmetical symbol or character (0) of no value by itself, but which increases or decreases the value of other figures according to its position" and 2) "a person who fills a place, but is of no importance of worth, a nonentity, a 'nothing'" (*OED*). Both definitions were in common use at the time of *Clarissa*'s writing. While Bella is clearly referring to



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herself, explicitly, in terms of the second definition, the first is also suggestive because it informs the relational aspect of the second.

<sup>75</sup> Richardson, *Clarissa* 333.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid* 192-3.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid* 195; 230.

<sup>78</sup> Anna Howe writes in an earlier letter, has given her family “an appetite to *continue* in themselves the possession of your estate,” which would “procure[...]

Clarissa “at least an *outward* respect from [her] brother and sister” (86). Clarissa is aware of this piece of property as a highly political element and wields it accordingly.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid* 283.

<sup>80</sup> For example, Warner associates limitations and stability with Clarissa, and subversion with (of course) Lovelace throughout *Reading Clarissa*.

<sup>81</sup> See Ruth Perry, “*Clarissa’s* Daughters, or the History of Innocence Betrayed: How Women Writers Rewrote Richardson,” *Women’s Writing*, vol. 1 no. 1 (1994), 5-24. Note that Perry does not argue that these literary “daughters” fully and uncomplicatedly adopt these tenets – they pervert and subvert them, as we might expect.

<sup>82</sup> Lovelace is constant and explicit in his romantic self-stylings and theatrical self-representations. For example, in one of the novel’s few portrayals of a landscape, Lovelace describes himself as a romantic hero: “*Else*, could I basely creep about—not her proud father’s house—but his paddock—and garden walls?—Yet (a quarter of a mile’s distance between us) not hoping to behold the least glimpse of her shadow?—*Else*, should I think myself repaid, amply repaid, if the fourth, fifth, or sixth midnight stroll, through unfrequented paths, and over briery enclosures, afford me a few cold lines; the even *expected* purport only to let me know that she values the most worthless person of her very worthless family more than she values me; and that she would not write at all, but to induce me to bear insults which un-*man* me to bear?...But was ever hero in romance (opposing giants and dragons excepted) called upon to harder trials!” (146)

<sup>83</sup> Lovelace quotes from Dryden’s *Aureng-Zebe* (1675) here, in *Clarissa* 609.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid* 724.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid* 724.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid* 724-5. Warner says of this moment, usefully, that Clarissa must “try to give that moment a meaning which will direct him away from his accustomed mode of action” (62), reinforcing my assertion that this reordering and “meaning-making” is a strategy of resistance. (Though for Warner, the end result is very different: Clarissa seeks to regain control of the tableaux in order to regain control of the text fully; I argue she is simply trying to evade the inevitability of her rape.)

<sup>87</sup> *ibid* 730.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid* 722.

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### Chapter Three

#### The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless: *Eliza Haywood's Promiscuous Machines*

<sup>1</sup> In Haywood, *Fantomina and Other Works*, eds. Alexander Pettit, Margaret Case Croskery and Anne C. Patchias (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2004), 49.

<sup>2</sup> Thompson, "Plotting Materialism: W. Charleton's 'The Ephesian Matron,' E. Haywood's 'Fantomina,' and Feminine Consistency," *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 35, no. 2 (Winter 2002), 199.

<sup>3</sup> Haywood, *Fantomina* 50.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid* 53.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid* 53.

<sup>6</sup> Richardson, *Clarissa*, ed. Angus Ross (London: Penguin, 1986), 726.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid* 726.

<sup>8</sup> Ros Ballaster, *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740* (Clarendon: Oxford UP, 1992) 1.

<sup>9</sup> Ballaster only mentions *Clarissa* once in her study; she does, however, imply that *Clarissa* participates in a "new era in the history of the English novel" inaugurated by *Pamela*, "whether in the establishment of sentiment as the dominating principle of novelistic fiction or domestic bourgeois values as opposed to aristocratic gallantry as the mainstay of novelistic ideology" (*Seductive Forms* 197). I push against both of these characterizations in my dissertation.

<sup>10</sup> Hultquist, "Haywood's Re-Appropriation of the Amatory Heroine in *Betsy Thoughtless*" *Philological Quarterly* (2006 Winter-Spring 85 1-2, 141-65), 142.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid* 141-2.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid* 142.

<sup>13</sup> For a recent, relevant -- if much broader -- consideration of the female libertine in the context of the origins of sensibility, see Laura Linker's *Dangerous Women, Libertine Epicures, and the Rise of Sensibility, 1670-1730* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Hultquist helpfully emphasizes the epistemological gains of libertine affection in *Betsy Thoughtless*; in the novel Haywood "implies that there are gradations of behavior, nuances of seduction, chances at redemption, and corresponding degrees of punishment or reward. Set against the behavior of other female characters, Betsy can vicariously experience the various amatory situations offered to her and modify her behavior so that she eventually can negotiate proper conduct" (149).

<sup>15</sup> See Deleuze's essay "Coldness and Cruelty," especially chapter 2, "The Role of Descriptions," where Deleuze outlines the quantitative value of the victim and the subsequent destaining of the Sadeian libertine (pp. 25-36), in *Masochism* (New York: Zone Books, 1999). Critics like Tiffany Potter have used Eliza Haywood's embrace of libertinism as an argument for her consistency across the spectrum of her fiction; see Potter, "'A God-Like Sublimity of Passion': Eliza Haywood's Libertine Consistency," *The Eighteenth-Century Novel*, vol. 1 (2001), 95-126.

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<sup>16</sup> Drury, "Haywood's Thinking Machines," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 21 no. 2 (Winter 2008-9), 204.

<sup>17</sup> Warner is cited in Drury, "Haywood's Thinking Machines," 201.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid* 204.

<sup>19</sup> Haywood, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, ed. Christine Blouch (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Literary Texts, 1998), 127.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*, 213.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid* 634.

<sup>22</sup> In his contribution to *The Passionate Fictions of Eliza Haywood: Essays on Her Life and Work* (eds. Kirsten T. Saxton and Rebecca P. Bocchicchio [Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2000]) Richetti claims Henry Fielding's histories as an original source of inspiration for Haywood's own stylistic shift at mid-century. Specifically, Richetti attributes Haywood's "loosely-strung" narrative (249) to an imitation of the digressive style featured in Fielding's *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* (1749). It is, of course, not impossible that Haywood was influenced by her former employer, yet I would hesitate to lean too heavily on Fielding's model as an explanation for Haywood's experimentation with narrative structure. Indeed, I find Richetti's claim that *Betsy Thoughtless* is little more than a "pretty good imitation" of Fielding reductive, especially in its assumption that Haywood merely transposed Fielding's narrative strategies without developing them much at all (248).

<sup>23</sup> Haywood, *Betsy Thoughtless* 36-7.

<sup>24</sup> In 1785, Clara Reeve famously applauds Haywood in *The Progress of Romance* for "employ[ing] the latter part of her life in expatiating the *offenses* of the former." One might well ask if such "offenses" are literary, personal, or both -- Reeve is ambiguous on this point. See *The Progress of Romance, Through Times, Countries, and Manners, with Remarks, & Etc.* (London: Printed for the author, 1785). Cited in Haywood, *Betsy Thoughtless*, 642 (Appendix D).

<sup>25</sup> Most studies of Haywood's later fiction acknowledge its participation in this trend; many of the studies on Haywood cited in this chapter make the connection, in some way or another, between *Betsy Thoughtless* and Richardsonian novels of virtue. The advantage of affirming Haywood's connection to the looming figure of Richardson is that it helps establish her participation in literary modes usually reserved -- at least, in more conservative accounts of the rise of the novel -- for male authors exclusively. It also provides a supplementary account to the progressive rise-of-the-novel arguments offered by critics like Ballaster and Potter, who do not account for this later period in Haywood's life because they focus on her earlier amatory fiction.

<sup>26</sup> In particular, Deborah J. Nestor in "Virtue Rarely Rewarded: Ideological Subversion and Narrative Form in Haywood's Later Fiction" (*SEL*, vol. 34 [1994]) challenges the too-easy location of Haywood in the didactic tradition popularized by Richardson. Nestor agrees that its "surface narrative" would "place it firmly" in the didactic tradition, but then qualifies the novel as a "highly complex, multiplot" work that exploits such a tradition while challenging some of its most basic assumptions: namely, as her title would suggest, that virtue is the ultimate reward (579).

<sup>27</sup> In her essay "The Story of Eliza Haywood's Novels: Caveats and Questions," published in Saxton and Bocchicchio, *The Passionate Fictions of Eliza Haywood*, Backscheider challenges "The Story" of Haywood's mid-century "conversion" and ostensible "conservatism" -- which even feminist scholars like Ros Ballaster and Jane Spencer have acknowledged, though they attribute it to financial need rather than true moral repentance. Backscheider instead suggests that Haywood's novels are better conceived on a

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continuum. She rightfully asks, “Why are we content with seeing Haywood’s texts as derivative and reactive rather than studying her *agency* in the history of the developing English novel?” (19).

<sup>28</sup> Haywood, *Selections from ‘The Female Spectator,’* ed. Patricia Meyer Spacks (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8.

<sup>29</sup> See Juliette Merritt’s excellent discussion of *The Female Spectator* in *Beyond Spectacle: Eliza Haywood’s Female Spectators* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), particularly the introduction, pp. 3-24, in which she connects the epistemological gains of the female spectator to *Betsy Thoughtless*, albeit to different ends than I aim at here.

<sup>30</sup> The complete passage reads: “To confine myself to any one Subject, I knew, could please but one kind of Taste, and my Ambition was *to be as universally read as possible*: From my Observations of human Nature, I found that Curiosity had, more or less, a Share in every Breast; and my Business, therefore, was to hit this reigning Humour in such a manner, as that the Gratification it should receive from being made acquainted with other People’s Affairs, should at the same time teach every one to regulate their own.” In *The Female Spectator*, ed. Spacks, 9 (my emphasis).

<sup>31</sup> Haywood, *Betsy Thoughtless* 93.

<sup>32</sup> Haywood echoes the political concerns about marriage shared by other proto-modern feminists, here, like Mary Astell, who flatly states in her *Reflections Upon Marriage* (1700) that “A Woman Indeed can’t properly be said to Choose” her husband, “all that is allow’d her, is to Refuse or Accept what is offer’d,” *Astell: Political Writings*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 43.

<sup>33</sup> Haywood, *Betsy Thoughtless* 127.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid* 142.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid* 131, 136.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid* 191.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid* 96.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid* 32.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid* 56.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid* 41.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid* 41.

<sup>42</sup> Beth Fowkes Tobin, “Introduction,” *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1997), xiv.

<sup>43</sup> Anderson, “Performing the Passions in Eliza Haywood’s *Fantomina* and *Miss Betsy Thoughtless*,” *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, vol. 46 no. 1 (Summer 2005), 5.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid* 2.

<sup>45</sup> See Thompson’s discussion of *Betsy Thoughtless* in *Ingenuous Subjection*, pp. 138-147, in which she argues for Betsy as “politically unconscious” (138).

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<sup>46</sup> Helene Moglen, *The Trauma of Gender: A Feminist Theory of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 4.

<sup>47</sup> In *The Dunciad*, reprinted in David Fairer and Christine Gerrard, *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Anthology*, 2nd edition (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 167-77, ll. 151, 155-6.

<sup>48</sup> Pope's evocative metaphor—disparaging Haywood's books as bastard children—imagines her writing as an unnatural form of sexual generation; throughout *The Dunciad*, such images of aberrant generation are deployed to malign bad writing as a form of literary parasitism and postlapsarian, even apocalyptic, moral corruption. As when Pope describes "genial Jacob" as "Call[ing] forth each mass, a Poem, or a Play: / How hints, like spawn, scarce quick in embryo lie, / How new-born nonsense first is taught to cry, / Maggots half-form'd in rhyme exactly meet, / And learn to crawl upon poetic feet" (lms. 57-62). See also Arthur Sherbo's article "No Single Scholiast: Pope's *The Dunciad*" for a discussion of the centrality of the generative metaphor to Pope's poem.

<sup>49</sup> Cited in the Broadview edition of *Love in Excess; Or, the Fatal Enquiry*, edited by David Oakleaf (Petersborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1995). Manley was part of the "fair Triumverate of Wit" along with Haywood and Aphra Behn; she is identified in Swift's poem by a reference to her work *The New Atalantis* (l. 31). Haywood, the other inspiration for Corinna, is identified in the final line by a reference to her *Memoirs of a Certain Island*, which is also cited by Pope in his footnote, and presumably also by the reference to Curll, who is also featured in Pope's poem.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, ll. 25-31.

<sup>51</sup> Ballaster, *Seductive Forms* 161.

<sup>52</sup> Sobba Green, *The Courtship Novel, 1740-1820: A Feminized Genre* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 25.

<sup>53</sup> Oakleaf, "Circulating the Name of A Whore: Eliza Haywood's Betsy Thoughtless, Betty Careless and the Duplicities of the Double Standard," *Women's Writing*, vol. 15 no. 1 (2008), 107.

<sup>54</sup> Haywood, *Betsy Thoughtless* 276.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.* 277.

<sup>56</sup> my emphasis; *ibid.* 279.

<sup>57</sup> my emphasis; *ibid.* 78.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.* 37.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.* 56.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.* 57-8.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.* 56. See Chapter VIII (pp. 66-74) which details the episode in Oxford, in which she and Miss Flora are nearly raped by two male students, and then suffer intense social humiliation at the hands of the gossipy, insular community.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.* 129.

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<sup>63</sup> *ibid* 125.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid* 83.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid* 27.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid* 178.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid* 178.

<sup>68</sup> At the outset, the narrator tells us that s/he refuses to “rush into” the particulars of Betsy’s history, flaunting her ability to manage and distribute textual information (13-4). Throughout, the narrator manipulates the flow of information, fully controlling the shape of Betsy’s history, with the exception of moments in which Betsy herself speaks.

<sup>69</sup> One need think only of her malicious play with Captain Hysom, Betsy’s overly zealous and unaffected suitor, who is teased mercilessly for his forthrightness and honesty, in Chapters XVI and XVII, pp. 128-48.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid* 178.

<sup>71</sup> my emphasis; *ibid* 179.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid* 557-8.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid* 634.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid* 235.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid* 236.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid* 241.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid* 240.

<sup>78</sup> See, for an excellent discussion of privacy in *Clarissa* not elsewhere considered, Christina Marsden Gillis’ *The Paradox of Privacy: Epistolary Form in Clarissa* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1984).

#### *Chapter Four*

##### *La Philosophie dans le boudoir: Communal Sexuality and Mutual Pleasure*

<sup>1</sup> See Lynn Festa, “Sentimental Bonds and Revolutionary Characters: Richardson’s *Pamela* in England and France,” in *The Literary Channel: The Inter-National Invention of the Novel*, eds. Margaret Cohen and Carolyn Dever (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 73-105 and Thomas O. BeeBee, *Clarissa on the Continent: Translation and Seduction* (State College, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> “Idée sur les romans” (Paris: Librairie Ancienne et Moderne, Edouard Rouveyre, 1878), 25-26; translation by Austryn Wainhouse and Richard Seaver in *Marquis de Sade: 120 Days of Sodom & Other Writings* (New York: Grove Press, 1966).

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<sup>3</sup> See pp. 5-6 of this chapter and footnote 6 for a more detailed discussion of Sade within the critical-historical contexts of sensibility.

<sup>4</sup> *La Nouvelle Justine, ou les Malheurs de la vertu*, published in 1799 but bearing a false date of 1797 and an erroneous place (Holland), is the third recognized version of *Les Infortunes de la vertu* (1787), which was discovered in the twentieth century by Maurice Heine and published for the first time in 1930. Michel Delon summarizes this history in his introduction to volume two of the *Pléiade* edition of Sade's *Oeuvres*, ed. Delon, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard 1990-1998), x-xii. For another compelling account of the complex relationship between these three (inter)texts, see Will McMorran, "Intertextuality and Urtextuality: Sade's *Justine* Palimpsest" in *Eighteenth Century Fiction*, vol. 19, no. 4 (2007), 367-390.

<sup>5</sup> John Phillips, "'Tout Dire?': Sade and the Female Body," *South Central Review* 19.4-20.1, *Special Issue: Murdering Marianne?: Violence, Gender and Representation in French Literature and Film* (Winter 2002-Spring 2003), 35, my emphasis.

<sup>6</sup> While there is little criticism dedicated to understanding the work of Sade, specifically, within the tradition of sensibility that I outline in my chapter, recent work has sought to more concretely establish such a link. See Katherine Astbury, "The Marquis de Sade and the Sentimental Tale: *Les Crimes de l'amour* as a subversion of sensibility," *Australian Journal of French Studies* 39, no. 1 (2002): 47-59, and Anne Coudreuse, "Éthique et pathétique dans le theater de Sade," in *Lire Sade: Actes du premier colloque international sur Sade aux USA*, ed. Norbert Sclipa (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004): 187-207. For more general, provocative considerations of the relationship of libertinage to Enlightenment sensibilities, see Anne Vincent-Buffault, *The History of Tears: Sensibility and Sentimentality in France*, trans. Teresa Bridgeman (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), especially 27-31, Catherine Cusset's preface to a special issue of *Yale French Studies* 94, *Libertinage and Modernity* (1999), 1-14, and Michel Delon, *Le savoir-vivre libertin* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> John Mullan, in his discussion of the sentimental novel, quite nicely sums up Adam Smith's interest in sympathy as "the faculty by which 'the passions and sentiments of others' become our own." See "Sentimental Novels," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 249. For a general consideration of Rousseau's pitié, see Christopher Brooke's article "Rousseau's Political Philosophy: Stoic and Augustinian Origins," in *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau*, ed. Patrick Riley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 94-123. Sade also clearly finds pedagogical fodder in his incorporation of the key sensationist figure of sensibility, the *homme-statue*, and his various "states" of sensation, even as he is believed to "depict an inverted image of the statue-man's characteristics of curiosity, surprise, and movement." See John O'Neal, *The Authority of Experience: Sensationist Theory in the French Enlightenment* (State College: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 149.

<sup>8</sup> For more on sensibility's eroticized politics of looking, see Laura Hinton, *The Perverse Gaze of Sympathy: Sado-masochistic Sentiments from Clarissa to Rescue 911* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999) and Marianne Noble, *The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Recent tableau theory has demonstrated that, inherent within the complex aesthetics governing beholder and *tableau* is the tension between seduction and resistance. Sade's use of the *tableau* as a governing form for representing orgiastic pleasure allows him to filter the particularities of individual sexual response within the fleetingly transient "ideal fixity" perpetuated by the moment of communal orgasm. Pierre Frantz describes the *tableau* thus: "[il] condense l'émotion et rayonne d'énergie simultanément... Le tableau participe d'une sorte de dialogique de la sensation" [The tableau simultaneously condenses emotion and releases its energy... The tableau participates in a dialogic of sensation]. In *L'esthétique du tableau dans le théâtre du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Pressées Universitaires de France, 1998), 35. On the *tableau* as potentially erotic, see also Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and the Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), especially his discussion of Jean-Baptiste Greuze's *Une Jeune fille qui pleure son oiseau mort* (1785), 56-60, and Jay Caplan, *Framed Narratives: Diderot's*

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*Genealogy of the Beholder* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985). For an excellent introduction to the literary applications of tableau theory more broadly, see also Tili Boon-Cuillé, *Narrative Interludes: Musical Tableaux in Eighteenth-Century French Texts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> In her excellent study of medico-philosophical approaches to understanding sensibility in eighteenth-century France, Anne Vila diagnoses Sade, along with his contemporary Laclos, as particularly prone to “a divided vision of human nature that typologizes one half of the human race as constitutionally fixed and depicts the other half as limitless in its ability to pursue and attain what passes for the state of enlightenment.” *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 292.

<sup>11</sup> See Jane Gallop, *Intersections: A Reading of Sade with Bataille, Blanchot, and Klossowski* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), especially 67-112, and Marcel Hénaff, *Sade, l'invention du corps libertin* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1978), especially Chapter 5, “Le mode d'improduction libertin,” 165-208.

<sup>12</sup> For Deleuze, the libertine is designated as the all-encompassing ontological center of each text, a figure usually recognized for his acute detachment from the world around him and his moral apathy in the face of sexual atrocities, a “libertine... caught in the hermetic circle of his own solitude and uniqueness,” who “is not even attempting to prove anything to anyone, but to perform a demonstration related essentially to the *solitude and omnipotence* of its author.” In Gilles Deleuze and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Masochism: Coldness and Cruelty & Venus in Furs*, trans. Jean McNeil and Aude Willm (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 19. Thus the Sadeian hero does not experiment as a form of representation -- in order to *understand*, or to *communicate*, but merely to exert compulsively his own profound sense of detachment that otherwise restricts his pleasure-without-limits.

<sup>13</sup> Any consideration of Sade's moral and ethical agenda must necessarily qualify its understanding of “morality.” As Catherine Cusset notes in her preface to *Libertinage and Modernity*, “Hate for love characterizes late libertinage and stands as a logical consequence of libertinage as a triumph of the ‘moment’ oblivious to moral or sentimental effects. For libertines, morality and love are together on the side of the unreal,” but she also observes that “[l]ibertine writers are paradoxical moralists who contradict traditional morals” (*YFS* 94), 4, 8. See also John Phillip's chapter on *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* in *Sade: The Libertine Novels* (London: Pluto Press, 2001), 62-86.

<sup>14</sup> Narratologists call this a competing first-person narrator. See Lubomír Doležel, “Truth and Authenticity in Narrative,” *Poetics Today* vol. 1.3 (Spring 1980), and James Phelan, *Living to Tell About it: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>15</sup> Sade muses in *La Philosophie*, “Il ne s'agit pas d'aimer ses semblables comme soi-même, puisque cela est contre toutes les lois de la nature... il n'est question que d'aimer nos semblables comme des frères, comme des amis que la nature nous donne, et avec lesquels nous devons vivre d'autant mieux dans un État républicain que la disparition des distances doit nécessairement resserrer les liens” [It is not a matter of loving your neighbors as yourselves, since this contradicts all laws of nature... it is simply a question of loving our neighbors as brothers, as friends whom nature gives us, and with whom we must live all the better in a republican state, in which the disappearance of social classes must necessarily tighten the bonds.] All French quotations in this essay are from the *Folio* edition of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, ed. Yvon Belaval (Paris: Gallimard, 1976). All English translations are the work of Joachim Neugroschel's Penguin edition of *Philosophy in the Boudoir* (London: Penguin Books, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> David Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau and Mary Shelley*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 89. See also Louis de Jaucourt, “Sympathie,” in *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, etc.*, eds. Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert. University of Chicago: ARTFL Encyclopédie Project (Spring 2011 Edition), Robert Morrissey (ed), <http://encyclopedia.uchicago.edu/>.



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<sup>17</sup> An important and notable exception to this claim is Anne Vila's work on Sade and the literature of sensibility in *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 2, 6-8. In its separation of virtue from the aims of the novel of sensibility, Todd's definition here is reminiscent of Sade's claim in "Idées sur les Romans" that the ideal subject of the novel is virtue in distress, a claim that also structures his preface to *Justine, ou les malheurs de la vertu*. See also Anne Vila's discussion of the two definitions of sensibility in Diderot's *Encyclopédie* -- one that emphasizes moral sensibility, and the other, physiological -- in the opening chapters of *Enlightenment and Pathology*, especially the introduction, "On Sensibility, the Sensible Body, and the Frontiers of Literature and Medicine," pp. 1-12, and Part I "The Making of the Sensible Body," pp. 13-110.

<sup>19</sup> According to Todd, "...there is an assumption that life and literature are directly linked...through the belief that the literary experience can intimately affect the living one... Sentimental literature is *exemplary of emotion*, teaching its consumers to produce a response equivalent to the one presented in its episodes." A technique of sentimentalism is to "arrest[...]" the story or argument "so that the author can conventionally *intensify the emotion* and the reader or spectator may have time *physically to respond*." (my emphasis; *Sensibility* 4-5)

<sup>20</sup> Brissendon is particularly provocative in his aligning of Richardson's *Clarissa*, arguably the century's greatest and most influential novel of sensibility, with *La Philosophie*. He parallels Clarissa's rape by Lovelace and the women of Mrs Sinclair's brothel to the sexual education of Eugénie, both carried out before a group, and the "agonizing and physically horrible death of Mrs Sinclair" to the "destruction of Mme de Mistval," which "performs an analogous function in the symbolic structures of the story" (*Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade*, [London: MacMillan, 1974], 288-9).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid 273; 269; 271. A more nuanced, recent consideration of the relationship between Sade and Austen, and of their shared influence on the tradition of sensibility, was presented by Caroline Warman at *A Different Sade: Food for Thought* at the British Academy, 7 June 2007. Accessed online at <http://www.britac.ac.uk/events/2007/sade/warman.cfm#noteref3>.

<sup>22</sup> my emphasis, ibid 279.

<sup>23</sup> For more on Sade's relationship to La Mettrie and Holbach, see John Phillip's discussion of *isolisme* in *Sade: The Libertine Novels*, when he argues that Sade's "communities" are solipsistic beyond even the most materialist Enlightenment *philosophes*, contending that, while communities would "imply elements of fraternity, fellow-feeling, and mutual support springing from sympathy or affection," the "fundamental instinct" of Sade's groups is "egoism, and not human compassion" (21).

<sup>24</sup> Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 25.

<sup>25</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 57, *Philosophy* 16.

<sup>26</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 58, *Philosophy* 16-17.

<sup>27</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 58, *Philosophy* 17.

<sup>28</sup> Saint-Ange describes Eugénie as possessing "les dispositions" [a natural aptitude] for sexual pleasure. Sade, *La Philosophie* 46, *Philosophy* 8.

<sup>29</sup> Both Hume and Smith find moral community in a natural human desire for fellowship. Todd describes community, in Hume, as a "spontaneous formation" -- much like the orgy -- in the *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40; see Todd, *Sensibility*, 27). See also Adela Pinch's chapter of Hume in *Strange Fits of*

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*Passion*, where she particularly emphasizes Hume as energized by the notion of emotional community. Pinch pushes against the critical commonplace that eighteenth-century moral sentiment was “individual,” as she sees Hume as *also* theorizing a community of passions (17).

<sup>30</sup> Vila, *Enlightenment and Pathology*, 288.

<sup>31</sup> Feminist criticism has both embraced Sade and resisted him; Sadeian critics have both embraced feminist approaches and resisted them. See, as an excellent example of this paradox not elsewhere considered in this dissertation, Annie Le Brun’s introduction to the Pauvert edition of Sade’s *Oeuvres complètes, Soudain un bloc d’abîme*, Sade (Paris: Pauvert, 1986), translated into English by Camille Naish as *Sade: A Sudden Abyss* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1990).

<sup>32</sup> Saint-Ange’s communal vision of the body cuts against the law of property as applied to human beings, which marks the passage from ideal to corrupt society in Rousseau’s *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755), in which he claims to “marquer dans le progrès des choses le moment où le droit succédant à la violence, le nature fut soumise à la loi; d’expliquer par quel enchainement de prodiges le fort pu: se résoudre à servir le faible, et le peuple à acheter un repos en idée, au prix d’une félicité réelle” (ed. Jacques Roger, Paris: GF Flammarion, 1971, 168). The purpose of the discourse is then “to indicate the progression of events the moment at which right replaced violence and nature was subjected to law; to explain the chain of miracles by which the strong could resolve to serve the weak and the people could purchase the semblance of peace at the price of true felicity” (translated by Julia Conaway Bondanella in *Rousseau’s Political Writings* [New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988, 9]).

<sup>33</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 84; trans. 34-5.

<sup>34</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 221; trans. 127. See, for another approach, Jane Gallop’s essay “The Liberated Woman,” in *Narrative* vol. 13.2 (May 2005), 89-104.

<sup>35</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 222, *Philosophy* 128-9.

<sup>36</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 81, *Philosophy* 32.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid* 82-3, trans. 33-4.

<sup>38</sup> In an interview with Catherine Cusset published in *Libertinage and Modernity*, in which she specifically addresses the problems of characterizing Sade as a proto-feminist, Nancy K. Miller offers another perspective, asserting that “libertinage” is not a “liberatory politics.” In *Yale French Studies* 94, 20.

<sup>39</sup> For a provocative discussion of the utopian possibilities of libertinage, in which she asks if “libertinage propound[s] alternative models of society” that challenge or reject its more “conservative” orders, see Carole F. Martin, “From the Mark to the Mask: Notes on Libertinage and Utopianism,” *Yale French Studies* 94, 101-115.

<sup>40</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 66, *Philosophy* 22-3.

<sup>41</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 68-9, *Philosophy* 23-4.

<sup>42</sup> Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power” reprinted in *Feminism and Pornography*, ed. Drucilla Cornell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 571.

<sup>43</sup> Gallop, “The Liberated Woman,” *Narrative*.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid*, 103, 102.

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<sup>45</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, "Faut-il brûler Sade?," a collection originally published as *Privilèges* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), 12. Translation from *Must We Burn Sade?* In *The Marquis de Sade: The 120 Days of Sodom and other writings*. Trans. Austryn Wainhouse and Richard Seaver (New York: Grove Press, 1966), 4. De Beauvoir's essay was originally published in French as "Faut-il brûler Sade?" in *Les Temps modernes* vol. 74 (1951): 1002-33, vol. 75 (1952): 1197-230.

<sup>46</sup> Gallop, *Intersections*, 3-4.

<sup>47</sup> Acker, "Reading the Lack of the Body: The Writing of the Marquis de Sade," in *Bodies of Work: Essays* (New York: Serpent's Tail, 1997), 66-80.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid*, 78-80.

<sup>49</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 59, *Philosophy* 17-8.

<sup>50</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 82, *Philosophy* 34.

<sup>51</sup> Translation mine. Frantz, *L'esthétique du tableau*, 35.

<sup>52</sup> Caplan, *Framed Narratives*, 18.

<sup>53</sup> Tili Boon Cuillé, *Narrative Interludes: Musical Tableaux in Eighteenth-Century French Texts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, ), 13.

<sup>54</sup> See David Denby, *Sentimental Narrative and the Social Order in France, 1760-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>55</sup> Lucienne Frappier-Mazur, *Writing the Orgy: Power and Parody in Sade*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 1-2. See also Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death & Sensuality*. Trans. Mary Dalwood. (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986).

<sup>56</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 40, *Philosophy* 3.

<sup>57</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 167, *Philosophy* 91.

<sup>58</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 239; *Philosophy* 140.

<sup>59</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 102, *Philosophy* 47.

<sup>60</sup> In her essay, "Foucault's Subject in *The History of Sexuality*," Lynn Hunt summarizes Foucault's position on Sade: "It is true, as Foucault remarks, that Sade tries to retain some kind of sovereign model of power, largely through his portrayal of Dolmancé, who is the director of the sexual tableaux and the ultimate authority in the *boudoir*." In *Discourses of Sexuality: From Aristotle to AIDS*, ed. Domna C. Stanton (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 90.

<sup>61</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 93, *Philosophy* 41.

<sup>62</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 112-3, *Philosophy* 53.

<sup>63</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 115, *Philosophy* 56.

<sup>64</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 60, *Philosophy* 18.

<sup>65</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 84.

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<sup>66</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 229, *Philosophy* 133.

<sup>67</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 152, *Philosophy* 82.

<sup>68</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 71-75.

<sup>69</sup> At the end of *Justine*, Justine comes across Juliette who – by taking the path of vice, and not virtue – has become extraordinarily successful and generous. She takes Justine in, comforts and clothes her, only to have Justine slip into a profound depression and one night, during a violent storm, to be electrocuted by lightning.

<sup>70</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 83, *Philosophie* 34.

<sup>71</sup> Sade, *La Philosophie* 223, *Philosophy* 127

## Conclusion

### *The Relational Self and the 'Postmodern' Eighteenth Century*

<sup>1</sup> According to Janet Tood, “Although it had its heyday from the 1740s to the late 1770s, the literature of sensibility is not discrete. Sentimental elements increase in importance through Restoration tragedy and early eighteenth-century comedy, and after the 1770s they also inhabit Gothic fiction and Romantic poetry. And yet sentimental literature is distinct from primarily Romantic or Gothic works...[which] uses sentimental contrasts of virtue and vice or malignancy and distressed worth, but goes far towards sensationalizing and sexualizing these elements, while it retreats from the didactic aim of sentimental literature.” In *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen Press, 1986), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction*, but also G.J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), and – for a later perspective – Gillian Russell and Clare Tuite, eds., *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> See Gérard Genette’s definition of these terms in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), especially pp. 227-231.

<sup>4</sup> See, for an example of this kind of reader, Samuel Johnson’s Life of Thomson in *Lives of the English Poets*, George Birbeck and Norman Hill, eds. (New York: Octagon Books, 1967) as well as Ralph Cohen’s *The Art of Discrimination: Thomson’s “The Seasons” and the Language of Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964). See also my discussion of Thomson’s sympathetic readers on p. XX of this dissertation.

<sup>5</sup> In Richardson’s preface to *Clarissa*, he describes “one of the principal views of the publication” as “to caution parents against the undue exertion of their natural authority over their children in the great article of marriage: and children against preferring a man of pleasure to a man of probity, upon that dangerous but too commonly received notion, *that a reformed rake makes the best husband*,” thus specifying different ways in which different readers can adopt and deploy the moral precepts of the text (*Clarissa*, ed. Angus Ross [London: Penguin Books, 1986], 36). Sade adopts a similarly didactic stance, albeit to very different ends, when he writes in his preface “To Libertines”: “Voluptuaries of all ages, of every sex, it is to you only that I offer this work; nourish yourselves upon its principles: they favor your passions, and these passions, whereof coldly insipid moralists put you in fear, are naught but the means Nature employs to

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bring man to the ends she prescribes to him; hearken only to these delicious promptings, for no voice save that of the passions can conduct you to happiness.”

<sup>6</sup> I try to be careful here in not overstating the formative relationship between text and reader, following the work of Michel De Certeau (particularly “Reading as Poaching” in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven F. Rendall [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984], 165-176). While we cannot say with certainty how any given reader might have experienced a given text, it is crucial to note that these texts strive – and strive *explicitly* – to engage their readers’ emotions and to shape those emotions towards moral ends. Whether or not such a project was ultimately effective is a matter of debate; for the suggestion that it *was* quite effective, see again Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*.

<sup>7</sup> Clingham, ed. *Questioning History: The Postmodern Turn to the Eighteenth Century* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1998), 15.